**INTERACTIVE TEACHING/LEARNING GUIDE**

**Kingdom Living**

**A Study of the Beatitudes**

**Week 11**

**Session Title: *Living at the Ceiling***

**Focal Passage: Matthew 5:17-48**

**Central Teaching/Learning Aim:** Learners will be able to describe Jesus’ instructions on how we should live our lives.

1. **Hook**
2. **The Count of Monte Cristo**

**Location:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DN5Kt_ILpi0>

**Length:** 1:23

**Synopsis:** The Count of Monte Cristo is an adventure novel by French author Alexandre Dumas completed in 1844. In this classic story Edmond Dantes is a guileless and honest man whose only ambition is to marry the beautiful Mercedes and live a peaceful life. His wonderful plans are abruptly shattered when his best friend, Fernand, deceives him and takes Mercedes for himself. Edmond Dantes is wrongly, but deliberately imprisoned. While in prison he develops a brilliant strategy for revenge against Fernand and all who betrayed him.

In this scene Edmond is given a wonderful inheritance from a fellow prisoner.

**Ask –** How would you feel if your best friend stole your freedom and your fiancé and arranged for you to spend the remainder of your life in prison?

**State –** In today’s lesson Jesus encourages his disciples to “turn the other cheek.”

1. **Optional Method – “Forest Creek Advocate Claims Pending Eviction is ‘Retaliation’”**

**Share** the following excerpt from *The Pensacola News Journal*:

Forest Creek Advocate Claims Pending Eviction is “Retaliation”

Laura Merritt is a resident of the Forest Creek Apartments on Patton Drive, a housing complex built in a flood zone in the 1970s. Periods of heavy or sustained rainfall often bring a tide of floodwater to the complex, and in the past several years, there have been multiple instances where Forest Creek residents were forced to evacuate their homes.

Merritt, who said she has lived in Forest Creek for the better part of three decades, has been a proverbial life-preserver for many displaced tenants. She's helped them find temporary shelter and supplies, organized community drives and maintained regular contact with elected officials about solutions for the community's flooding woes.

More recently, she said she's been talking to attorneys about a possible class action suit to compensate tenants for losses and inconvenience caused by the repetitive flooding. Earlier this month, Merritt was issued a 10-day notice that her rental agreement was being terminated for lease violations, but she believes it was really a veiled response to the talk of legal action.

“Forest Creek Advocate Claims Pending Eviction is ‘Retaliation,’” Pensacola News Journal, Pensacola, FL, July 25, 2017.

**Ask –** What is our first reaction when we are wronged?

**State –** In today’s Bible study Jesus tells his disciples that they should not keep score when others treat them wrong. Instead they should love and forgive.

1. **Optional Method – Nate Larkin – I Am Second**

**Location:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Cw7aWUQeWY>

**Length:** 8:24

**Synopsis:** Nate Larkin is a former pastor who earned his M.Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary. He is now a freelance writer, a speaking coach and the founder of The Samson Society. He is also a recovering sex addict.

**Ask –** What does Nate’s story tell us about the nature of sin?

**State –** Nate’s experience started with a fascination. Then it progressed to involvement in pornography. The pornography led to adultery. In today’s scripture Jesus tells us that lust is the precursor to adultery.

1. **Book**

1. **Write** the following outline on the marker board.

Jesus’ Interpretation of the Law

1. Jesus’ Intent – Fulfill the Law (Matthew 5:17-20)
2. Jesus’ Illustrations (Matthew 21-47)
3. Jesus Says “Be Perfect” (Matthew 5:48)
4. **In advance** of the weekend ask a member of your class to research the meaning of “the Law and the Prophets.” Ask them to be prepared to share what they have learned in class. Remind them that their presentation should take no more than two minutes! At the beginning of the study of the Bible content, invite your volunteer to share the various meanings they have discovered.
5. **Utilize** the discussion guide to examine the Scripture passages.
6. **Optional Method – Jesus’ Six Statements**

**Divide** your class into six teams and assign each team one of the following topics:

1. Murder – Matthew 5:21-26
2. Adultery – Matthew 5:27-30
3. Divorce – Matthew 5:31-32
4. Oaths – Matthew 5:33-37
5. Eye for an Eye – Matthew 5:38-42
6. Love Your Enemies – Matthew 5:43-47

**Each team** should answer the following questions:

1. What was the common understanding of the Law?
2. What interpretation did Jesus give to that Law?
3. What makes Jesus’ interpretation hard to apply to our lives?
4. What would you need to change in your life if you embraced Jesus’ interpretation of the Law?

**Give** the class fifteen minutes to complete their work. Call the class together and debrief.

1. **Look**
2. **Divide** your class into six discussion groups. Assign each group one of the case studies.
3. **Took**
4. **Turkish – Armenian War**

**Share** the following story with your class:

The Turkish – Armenian War was fought in the early part of the 20th Century by The First Republic of Armenia and Turkish Nationalists. During the war an Armenian nurse had been held captive, along with her brother, by the Turks. Her brother was slain by a Turkish soldier before her eyes. Somehow she escaped and later became a nurse in a military hospital. One day she was stunned to find that the same man who had killed her brother had been captured and brought wounded to the hospital where she worked. Something within her cried out “Vengeance” but a stronger voice called for her to love. She nursed the man back to health. Near the end of his hospitalization the recuperating soldier asked her, “Why didn’t you let me die?” Her answer was, “I am a follower of Him who said, ‘Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you.’” Impressed with her answer, the young soldier replied, “I have never heard such words before. Tell me more. I want this kind of religion.”

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

**State –** Each of these teachings of Jesus are counter-cultural. Jesus tells us to do things that the world and our common sense tell us not to do.

**Ask –** What happened when this young nurse followed the teachings of Jesus? What results might we expect?

**State –** Jesus has implied that we can have a positive effect on the world. He says that we can change the world around us. Jesus has given us this charge. It is up to us to follow his command.

**Close in prayer,** asking that God help us follow Jesus’ teachings.

1. **Optional Method – $3.00 Worth of God**

**State –** Let me share with you the words of Wilbur Rees. Rees said:

I would like to buy $3.00 worth of God, please. Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I don't want enough of Him to make me love a black man or pick beets with a migrant. I want ecstasy, not transformation; I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack. I would like to buy $3.00 worth of God, please.

**State –** Rees penned these words to capture in a humorous way the unspoken, but very real sentiments of many Christians. In today’s lesson Jesus challenged us to transform ourselves. He requires us to be different from the world, but we are comfortable being like everyone else.

**Ask –** Do you want more than $3 worth of God? What will you do this week to embrace Jesus’ teaching?

**Close in prayer,** asking God to transform us into the likeness of Christ.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Teacher Copy

1. What was the intent of Jesus when it came to the Law and the Prophets? (Matthew 5:17)

**[Jesus said he did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them.]**

1. What is “the Law and the Prophets?”
2. What did the Law prohibit? How did Jesus amend the Law? (Matthew 5:21-22)

**[The Law says “do not murder.” Jesus amended this to say that anyone who is angry with his brother is subject to judgment.]**

1. What does Jesus say we should do if we are in worship and we remember that our brother has something against us? (Matthew 5:23-24)

**[If we are worshipping and remember that someone has something against us we should leave worship, find our brother and be reconciled to him.]**

1. What does the Law say about adultery? What does Jesus add? (Matthew 5:27-28)

**[The Law says not to commit adultery. Jesus adds that if a man looks on a woman lustfully he has already committed adultery with her in his heart.]**

1. What is Jesus’ radical treatment for adultery? (Matthew 5:29-30)

**[Jesus says that if our eyes or hands cause us to sin, we should gouge them out and cut them off.]**

1. What changes do you need to make in your life to avoid the temptation of lust?
2. What does the Law say about divorce? What addition did Jesus make to this Law? (Matthew 5:31-32)

**[The Law says a man can divorce his wife by giving her a certificate of divorce. Jesus adds that if the wife has not been unfaithful to the man and he divorces her, he causes her to sin.]**

1. What are some ways divorce hurts people?
2. What does the Law say about oaths? How did Jesus update this Law? (Matthew 5:33-37)

**[The Law says that we should keep our word. Jesus says that we should not swear an oath at all.]**

1. Why do people swear? What are some words people use when they swear? Is this the same as a curse word?
2. What familiar proverb does Jesus quote? What does Jesus say about violence? (Matthew 5:38)

**[Jesus quotes the proverb, “Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.” Jesus says if someone wants to steal from us or do us harm we should give more than they require and “turn the other cheek.”]**

1. Where do we draw the line between our rights and our responsibility to forgive?
2. What common sense rule did Jesus quote? How did Jesus say we should treat our enemies? (Matthew 5:43-44)

**[Jesus quotes that common sense rule that says “love friends and hate enemies.” Jesus says we should love our enemies, too.]**

1. What attitudes would have to change if you were to love and pray for your enemies?
2. How does Jesus conclude his teaching? (Matthew 5:48)

**[Jesus instructs us to be perfect, just as God is perfect.]**

1. Is this possible? How?

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Student Copy

1. What was the intent of Jesus when it came to the Law and the Prophets? (Matthew 5:17)
2. What is “the Law and the Prophets?”
3. What did the Law prohibit? How did Jesus amend the Law? (Matthew 5:21-22)
4. What does Jesus say we should do if we are in worship and we remember that our brother has something against us? (Matthew 5:23-24)
5. What does the Law say about adultery? What does Jesus add? (Matthew 5:27-28)
6. What is Jesus’ radical treatment for adultery? (Matthew 5:29-30)
7. What changes do you need to make in your life to avoid the temptation of lust?
8. What does the Law say about divorce? What addition did Jesus make to this Law? (Matthew 5:31-32)
9. What are some ways divorce hurts people?
10. What does the Law say about oaths? How did Jesus update this Law? (Matthew 5:33-37)
11. Why do people swear? What are some words people use when they swear? Is this the same as a curse word?
12. What familiar proverb does Jesus quote? What does Jesus say about violence? (Matthew 5:38)
13. Where do we draw the line between our rights and our responsibility to forgive?
14. What common sense rule did Jesus quote? How did Jesus say we should treat our enemies? (Matthew 5:43-44)
15. What attitudes would have to change if you were to love and pray for your enemies?
16. How does Jesus conclude his teaching? (Matthew 5:48)
17. Is this possible? How?

**Case Studies**

**Case Study 1 – Murder**

Ann is a co-worker. She overheard Jack talking about a plan to improve customer retention, stole it and submitted it to the boss as her own work. She has spread lies about Jack to other employees. Early in Jack’s employment he loaned Ann some money and she never paid it back. Jack is angry and feels that his anger is justified. He has sworn to get even with Ann.

1. In Matthew 5:21-26 Jesus says that anger is the precursor to what sin? How does Jack’s experience relate to Jesus’ teaching? What should he do?
2. What are some redemptive ways that you can deal with your anger?

**Case Study 2 – Adultery**

Nate was a pastor. While in seminary he and his wife traveled to New York City on a trip jointly sponsored by the school and an organization called “Women Against Pornography.” Nate got a firsthand look at the porn industry in the city. He was both disgusted and, at the same time, fascinated. Overnight he found himself venturing alone into X-rated theaters and sex shops. One Christmas Eve on the way to preach a Candlelight Service he pulled his car over to the curb to pick up a prostitute.

1. In Matthew 5:27-30 Jesus says that lust is the precursor to what sin? How does Jesus’ teaching relate to Nate’s experience?
2. How can a person control lust?

**Case Study 3 – Divorce**

John and Marsha have been married for ten years. Both agree that the first six years of marriage were beautiful and memorable but the last four have been miserable. Neither John nor Marsha have been unfaithful and there has been no abuse in their relationship. It seems the problem began when Marsha went back to work. They both say, “We can stay married and be miserable or get a divorce and be happy.”

1. In Matthew 5:31-32, does Jesus give an acceptable reason for divorce? How does Jesus’ teaching relate to John and Marsha? What should they do?
2. What advice would you give to John and Marsha?

**Case Study 4 – Oaths**

Keith is the purchasing director at a small company. He is responsible for the inventory in the supplies room. He has noticed over the past six weeks that increasing numbers of supplies have gone missing. Keith decides to bring in the employees one at a time to ask them about the missing supplies. He talks to a couple of employees and the word gets around about the investigation. When he talks to Joe, Keith asks if Joe knows anything about the supplies. Joe responds, “I promise I did not take the supplies. I swear to God! God is my witness! I make that vow on my mother’s grave!”

1. In Matthew 5:33-37, what does Jesus say about swearing an oath? How does Jesus’ teaching relate to Joe’s response to the questioning? If you were Keith what would you think about how Joe responded?
2. What might Joe have said that would have been a more acceptable response?

**Case Study 5 – Eye for an Eye**

Jane was appointed to a new position as a team leader during a restructuring at her work. She was in competition with a previous manager for the job. Jane encountered resistance to her leadership from the existing team because they felt a loyalty to the previous manager. The team talked often behind Jane’s back, always finding fault with her leadership. The team called a secret meeting, created a list of inaccurate or overblown complaints and submitted them to Jane’s supervisor. They asked that Jane be dismissed immediately.

1. In Matthew 5:38-42, what does Jesus say to someone who has been wronged by someone else? How does Jesus’ teaching relate to Jane’s situation? What should Jane do?
2. What advice would you give to Jane?

**Case Study 6 – Love Your Enemies**

Philip’s son plays on the soccer team at his school. Philip has noticed that some of the other parents have adopted an extremely adversarial attitude toward every other team they play. They shout hateful obscenities at the other team and carry signs putting the other teams down. The attitude has spread to all the teams in the league. Now parents of different teams look at other parents as “the enemy.” One of the other parents asks Philip to hold one of their signs. What should he do?

1. In Matthew 5:43-47, what does Jesus say about how we should relate to enemies? If you were Philip what would you do?
2. What advice would you give to Philip?

**THEE WORD FOR THE WEEK**

**The Discipleship Challenge**

**Mark 8:34-38, 10:35-45**

**Monday - Read Mark 8:34**

* What do you think Jesus means to practically take up your cross? How about to deny yourself?
* What is your cross?
* In what ways are you not denying yourself and taking up your cross?
* How can you follow Jesus more faithfully today?

**Tuesday - Read Mark 8:34-37**

* What does it look like for you to lose your life for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel?
* What choices do you make on a daily basis that show what your priorities are when it comes to the way you spend your time?
* What do you spend the majority of your time, thoughts, energy and money on and how has that brought your fulfillment?
* Think about something Jesus would want you to reevaluate in your life because you are having to pay for it with your soul. What are you going to do about it?

**Wednesday - Read Mark 8:38**

* What, if anything, keeps you from speaking up in defense of the Word of God?
* How does this verse change what you will do in the future when the opportunity arises?

**Thursday - Read Mark 10:35-39**

* Why would James and John ask such a thing?
* What is the cup Jesus has to drink? Will you drink it?
* What is the baptism Jesus is baptized with? Will you follow His example?

**Friday - Read Mark 10: 35-45**

* What did Jesus do to prevent any controversy from growing among the disciples?
* How can you implement this example at work or in your home?

**EXEGETICAL ~ THEOLOGICAL ~ PEDAGOGICAL**

**Note**: In Matthew 5-7 Jesus taught the way of true righteousness (see 5:20 with 7:13-14). True righteousness (how to be “right” before the holy God) is not a man centered, works-generated product of following “religious rules” (5:20). Rather, true righteousness requires a change of attitude and behavior that results from God doing a supernatural work in the character of a true believer. And only those in whom God “works out” His supernatural work of salvation can know what it means to be blessed/happy. With God’s help, we can reflect His righteous character in our thinking and doing so as to enjoy the blessings He intends for His Kingdom subjects.

Here is Jesus’ party platform, His administrative insights, His Kingdom manifesto. When we accept His rule, we can be 100% sure of our salvation/ deliverance into His Kingdom – not because we can justify ourselves, but because we realize we can’t; not because we are well, but because we realize we are sick; not because we are rich (materially or spiritually), but because we realize we are spiritually impoverished.

Today, in Matthew 5:17-48, Jesus teaches that whereas entrance into the Kingdom demands more than super-human righteousness, that is, a righteousness that exceeds that of the most religious of the religious, who merely seek to keep the lowest, floor-level, demands of the Law (and fail at even that lowest level of keeping the “letter of the Law”), those who have entered the Kingdom through acknowledging their own hopelessness, their spiritual bankruptcy, will consistently live at the highest, ceiling-level of the Law, keeping what was written and what Jesus taught in the “spirit/Spirit” of the Law.

(**Exegetical**: What it meant to the Jewish believers back **THEN**)

**THE CONTENT OF JESUS’ TEACHING**

**REGARDING ENTRANCE INTO THE KINGDOM** . . .

**DEMANDED A PERFECT FULFILLING OF THE LAW’S DEMANDS**

**AND THE PROPHETS’ PROMISES**, (Matthew 5:17-48).

**Note**: “The law, the books from Genesis to Deuteronomy, was Scripture par excellence for the Jews, and they examined it with minute thoroughness. . . . They could easily concentrate on discussions of those commandments and on keeping the letter of the law in such a way as to find little place for weightier matters. Jesus had a continuing dispute with people with this approach (see ch. 23), and from their point of view it was easy to accuse him of not taking the law seriously. From the point of view of his own followers there was also a problem. He taught them that salvation is all of grace; people do not merit salvation by their own good works. What then was the place of the commands that Scripture conveys so clearly? It was important for Matthew’s readers (as well as for the Jews and the disciples at the time of Jesus) that Jesus’ attitude to the law be made plain, and in this section of the Sermon Matthew includes important teaching about the law. He shows that Jesus affirmed its continuing validity and that he came to fulfil it. . . . The statement that the righteousness of those who enter the kingdom must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees must have come as a very surprising piece of information” (Morris, L. [*The Gospel according to Matthew*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcmatt;ref=Bible.Mt5.17-20;off=660;ctx=kingdom_of_heaven.$E2$80$9D$0A~The_law,_the_books_f), 106–107).

I. **The reasons the Law’s eternal demands and the prophets’ certain promises were to be kept, which demands and promises Jesus came to keep** . . . **was because absolute righteousness – that exceeding the Scribes’ and the Pharisees’ – was necessary to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven and because Kingdom subjects were expected to keep the Law**, (5:17-20).

A. **The content of Jesus’ command to His Kingdom subjects** . . . **was that they not think that He had come to do away with the demands the Law or the promises of the prophets**, (17a).

B. **The content of Jesus’ instruction to his Kingdom subject** . . . **was that He had come, not to do away with, but to fulfill the demands of the Law and the promises of the prophets**, (17b).

**Note**: Jesus firmly disclaims any intention of doing away with any part of the Bible. His program had some resounding novelties about it, but he did not abandon Scripture, as his habit of referring to it shows. Rather, he fulfilled it. He did not have a negative approach to it but a positive one” (Morris, 107–108).

**“***To fulfil* has been understood in three main ways: (1) It may mean that he would do the things laid down in Scripture. (2) It may mean that he would bring out the full meaning of Scripture. (3) It may mean that in his life and teaching he would bring Scripture to its completion. Each points to an aspect of the truth, and Jesus may well have meant that he would fulfil Scripture in more ways than one” (Morris, 108).

C. **The reason Jesus came to fulfill the demands of the Law and the promises of the prophets** . . . **was because they were eternally certain and eternally demanding**, (18).

**Note**: “*Until* *heaven* *and earth pass away* points to the end of created things. *Heaven* does not here denote the permanent abode of the blessed but part of the physical universe; it is used with *earth* in this expression to convey the thought of the totality of creation. It will all in due course *pass away,* but what God has said in Scripture is more permanent than that. Jesus says emphatically that it will certainly not pass away. He is referring to written Scripture, as the terms he employs show clearly” (Morris, 109).

D. **The result of the Law’s demands and the prophets’ promises being eternal** . . . **was that those followers who disobey and teach others to disobey the demands of the Law and the promises of the prophets will be least in Jesus’ kingdom, while those followers who obey and teach others to obey the demands of the Law and the promises of the prophets will be great in Jesus’ Kingdom**, (19).

**Note**: “Since Scripture is of continuing validity and Jesus is to fulfil it, the breaking of the least of the commandments is not unimportant. . . . Even to nullify just *one* commandment is serious. . . . [Jesus] refers to the fact that some of the commandments are not as weighty as others, and he selects the *least* of them for notice. Even this one is to be kept. Verses 21–48 show that this does not mean the literal interpretation of every injunction. There must be careful interpretation. But no commandment is to be taken lightly. The person of whom Jesus is speaking not only fails to keep the light commandment but teaches others to take up the same attitude. Such a person qualifies to *be called* *least* in God’s kingdom. A wrong attitude to God’s commandments means a lowly position in God’s kingdom. The other side of this coin concerns the person who both obeys the commandments and teaches others to do the same. This is the person who attains honor, who is called *great* in the kingdom. Apparently both are in the kingdom, but the former has just made it (cf. 1 Cor. 3:15) whereas the latter is held in honor” (Morris, 110).

E. **The reason the Law’s eternal demands and the prophets’ certain promises were to be kept** . . . **was because absolute righteousness – that exceeding the Scribes’ and the Pharisees’ – was necessary to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven**, (20).

**Note**: “Jesus calls for his followers to have a *righteousness* that *exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees.* He is surely using the term *righteousness* in a sense different from that which the scribes and Pharisees attached to it. They looked for strict legal correctness, whereas Jesus looked for love. . . . Jesus has already spoken of a different kind of righteousness (3:15), and it is central to the Christian gospel that Jesus would fulfil all that Scripture means in making a new way, a way in which he would bring those who believe in him to salvation. This does not mean cheap grace, for the words of this verse bring out the truth that those who have been touched by Jesus live on a new plane, a plane in which the keeping of God’s commandments is important. Their righteousness is a given righteousness. Nowhere do we get the idea that the servant of God achieves in his own strength the kind of living that gives him standing before God. But when he is given that standing, Jesus looks to him to live in accordance with that standing” (Morris, 111).

II. **Jesus’ interpretations, in contrast to traditional teaching, regarding the meaning of the Law** . . . **demanded an absolute, and therefore righteous, obedience**, (5:21-47).

**Note**: “Jesus’ understanding of keeping the law meant a great deal more than making sure that the letter of the law was not infringed. For him it was important that the deeper implications of what God had commanded be understood and put into practice. He brings this out with reference to specific commands that the Pharisees had no difficulty in keeping in the literal sense. He shows that in each case a principle is involved. When this is understood, keeping the commands is far from the simple thing the Pharisees understood. He is not abrogating the law but exposing the limitations of the way some provisions in it had been understood” (Morris, 112).

“Jesus was clearly establishing the ‘ceiling’ above these ‘floor’ demands of the OT: ‘You have heard that it was said [‘**floor’**] . . . , but I say to you [‘**ceiling’**]. To reiterate, there is more to meeting the divine demand than simply obedience to the letter of the law.

“There is a gap between ‘floor’ and ‘ceiling,’ between the legal and the ideal in the OT. To take another example: merely refraining from idolatry (Ex 20:3; ‘floor’) does not meet the ideal of the divine demand to love Yahweh with all one’s heart, soul and strength (‘ceiling’). The avoidance of false worship may have precluded reprimand and retribution, but the ethical goal was far more comprehensive and, involving matter of the mind and heart, impossible to legislate with any useful degree of specificity. ‘In this sense ethics is not so much a system of obligations [to law] as a way of communion with God’” (Kuruvilla, A. *Privilege the Text*, 181).

“It is not correct to say that [Jesus] replaces the law with his own commands, for in no case does he relax a provision of the law. Rather, he shows that, rightly understood, the law goes much further than his hearers had reckoned” (Morris, 114).

1. **Jesus’ interpretation** [the ceiling], **in contrast to traditional teaching** [the floor], **regarding** **murder** . . . **demanded a conscience free from all anger**, (21-26).

**Note: “**For [Jesus’ hearers] it was enough not to put somebody to death; for Jesus that was just the beginning. He goes to the cause of murder and includes being angry in the scope of the command.

“Interestingly, it is not the anger of the person Jesus is addressing of which he speaks, but anger provoked by that person. It is not enough to control one’s temper (though that is important); one must not arouse other people’s anger” (Morris, 114-116).

1. **The teachers’ interpretation** . . . **said that whoever murdered would suffer judgment** [the floor – minimum], (21).

2. **Jesus’ interpretation** . . . **said that whoever acts in anger, contempt, or slander will suffer God’s judgment** [the ceiling – maximum expectation], (22).

3. **Jesus’ solution to the sin of acting in anger, contempt, or slander** . . . **was to reconcile a wrong as quickly as possible**, (23-26).

B. **Jesus’ interpretation** [the ceiling], **in contrast to traditional teaching** [the floor], **regarding** **adultery** . . . **demanded a constraint on all sexual desire/lust**, (27-30).

**Note**: “Jesus cites the prohibition of adultery and goes on to point out the significance of the lustful look. It is the look that leads to the physical act and thus comes under condemnation. Just as with the command not to murder, Jesus is concerned with the inner state that leads to action and does not simply prohibit the outward deed.

“Again we have an authoritative word from Jesus . . . He says that the lustful look (which the rabbis sometimes mentioned) is wrong in itself; to lust after a woman is already to have broken the commandment” (Morris, 117-118).

“[Jesus] is not, of course, advocating self-mutilation, nor is he suggesting that if people engage in this kind of surgery their evil desires will be exorcised. But this vivid imagery “emphasizes the crucial importance of taking whatever measures are necessary to control natural passions that tend to flare out of control’” (Morris, 119).

1. **The teachers’ interpretation** . . . **said that adultery was forbidden, sinful** [the floor – minimum], (27).

2. **Jesus’ interpretation** . . . **said that whoever desires another, even in his/her heart, to commit adultery, has already committed adultery** [the ceiling – maximum expectation], (28).

3. **Jesus’ solution to the sin of adultery** . . . **was to place every necessary, even extreme, limit on one’s senses which stimulate lust**, (29-30).

C. **Jesus’ interpretation** [the ceiling], **in contrast to traditional teaching** [the floor], **regarding** **divorce** . . . **demanded a commitment to “one flesh” relationships**, (31-32).

**Note**: “This passage assumes the practice of divorce and speaks of the way it was regulated in the Mosaic law. The *bill of divorce* was a protection for the woman; a capricious husband could not drive her from his home and afterward claim that she was still his wife. He must give her the document that set out her right to marry someone else. . . . Against such a background Jesus calls on people to appreciate the true meaning and solemnity of marriage. We should bear in mind that he is laying down great principles that should guide conduct.

“With the emphatic *But I say to you* Jesus moves to his own understanding of the position. For him marriage was intended to be a lifelong union of one man and one woman, and it was not to be dissolved lightly. He recognizes that *a matter of fornication* is a reason for divorce, and tells his hearers that divorce for any other reason is invalid (cf. Mal. 2:16). A man who divorces his wife and thus, in a Jewish situation, compels her to marry someone else (in first-century Jewish society how else could she live?) makes her an adulteress. There is a problem in that the prohibition of divorce in Mark 10:11–12; Luke 16:18 is absolute. There is no provision there for divorce on account of sexual sin” (Morris, 120-121).

Since the term fornication (*porneia*) has a range of meaning, it is necessary to consider its use in this context, and in Matthew 19 as well. Since all the other examples in Jesus’ teaching here raises the bar of righteousness, since this is a Jewish, legal, adversarial context, since both Mark and Luke make no provision for divorce, and since Leviticus 18:6ff; Matthew 14:3-4; Acts 15:20, 29 (all dealing with Jewish legal issues) uses *proneia* to refer to marriage to a near relative, it seems best to assign that same referent here. Jesus was saying that the only legal claim to divorce in accord with God’s Kingdom values is if one discovers he/she is married to a near relative. This interpretation maintains the floor-ceiling metaphor.

“Jesus lays down the highest standard for both sexes. Divorce might happen, but it was not meant to be. Marriage is for life” (Morris, 122).

1. **The teachers’ interpretation** . . . **said that whoever divorced must write a legal document of release from the marriage** [the floor – minimum], (31).

2. **Jesus’ interpretation** . . . **said that whoever divorces, except for marriage to a near relative** (see Leviticus 18:6ff; Matthew 14:3-4; Acts 15:20, 29) **commits and causes adultery** [the ceiling – maximum expectation], (32).

D. **Jesus’ interpretation** [the ceiling], **in contrast to traditional teaching** [the floor], **regarding** **deception/lying** . . . **demanded conversations expressing truth**, (33-37).

**Note**: “The command not to break an oath is not given in exactly the words of the Old Testament, but words very similar to them are to be found (Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2; Deut. 23:21; Ps. 50:14; Zech. 8:17). In any case Jesus is giving us the way in which Scripture was understood. The use of both the negative *(‘You shall not break your oath’)* and the positive *(‘you shall keep* *your oaths’)* gives emphasis to the importance of respecting sworn testimony.

“He is saying in the strongest terms that those who follow him must speak the truth. They must never take the line that only when an oath is sworn need they be truthful. *At all* with the negative excludes the oath altogether. There must never be the need for it.

“The important thing, Jesus is saying, is to tell the truth and keep one’s pledges without insisting that a certain form of words must be used if it is to be binding. No oath is necessary for the truthful person” (Morris, 123-124).

1. **The teachers’ interpretation** . . . **said that “swearing in God’s name” demanded speaking the truth** [the floor – minimum], (33).

2. **Jesus’ interpretation** . . . **said that no one should use God’s name as an excuse for deceiving** [the ceiling – maximum expectation], (34).

3. **Jesus’ solution to the sin of deception, especially by means of swearing** . . . **was always to speak the truth**, (35-37).

E. **Jesus’ interpretation** [the ceiling], **in contrast to traditional teaching** [the floor], **regarding** **revenge** . . . **demanded a compensation of graciousness**, (38-42).

**Note**: “Revenge comes easily to the human race. We have a natural tendency to retaliate when anyone harms us (or even when the harm is in our imagination!). But Jesus instructs his followers to eschew hitting back in all its forms; we should even go the “second mile” in doing more than the enemy asks. This is a radically new approach to the question of grievances. Jesus is, of course, still dealing with great principles, not laying down rules. We must not think that he held that his followers should never right wrongs, for example, nor that he felt that they must give to every beggar who approaches them. Were this so, all Christians would live under tyranny and in a state of destitution. But the principles that we are to refrain from asserting our rights and that we should put the needs of others before our own run through all of life and mark the difference between the servant of God and the worldling.

“There will be occasions when protest is in order, as when Jesus himself drew attention to an illegality at his trial (John 18:22–23). But such occasions are never for the purpose of revenge or the like.

“The follower of Jesus may perhaps not be in a position to give the borrower exactly what he asks, but that does not mean that he rejects him. It may be only a kind word or good advice, but he gives what he can in the circumstances in which he finds himself” (Morris, 126, 127, 128).

1. **The teachers’ interpretation** . . . **said that revenge was a right, if not a responsibility** [the floor – minimum], (38).

2. **Jesus’ interpretation** . . . **said that expressing gracious forgiveness and compensation superseded all claims of rights** [the ceiling – maximum expectation], (39-42).

F. **Jesus’ interpretation** [the ceiling], **in contrast to traditional teaching** [the floor], **regarding** **hatred** . . . **demanded a compassion that reaches out to both friends and enemies**, (43-47).

**Note**: “This section is of fundamental importance for an understanding of the Christian ideal of love. We all love our friends, but love of our enemies is quite another matter. But the followers of Jesus are not to take their standards from the communities in which they live. The God they serve is a loving God, and therefore they are to be loving people. Jesus points out that they must learn from God’s love. God’s good gifts, the sunshine and the rain, are given to all alike, the bad as well as the good. Those who serve God should show a similar generous attitude to enemies as well as to friends”

(Morris, 129).

1. **The teachers’ interpretation** . . . **said that everyone was obliged to hate their enemy, even as everyone was obliged to love their neighbor** [the floor – minimum], (43).

2. **Jesus’ interpretation** . . . **said that everyone was obliged to love and pray for his/her enemies as well as his/her neighbors/friends** [the ceiling – maximum expectation], (44).

3. **The result of loving both friends and enemies** . . . **was that Jesus’ followers would become His true children**, (45-47).

III. **The content of Jesus’ command to His Kingdom subjects, as a result of His correct/accurate/righteous/maximum interpretation of the Law’s demands** . . . **was “Be perfect, complete, mature,”** (5:48).

**Note**: “Jesus ends this part of his discourse with a future normally understood as a command: *You shall be* . . . This is surely correct: there is a command here. But may we not also see something of a promise? Jesus puts his command in such a way that disciples may look for divine help as they press toward God’s goal for them. His *therefore* relates this future to what has gone before: because of the importance of showing in their lives that they are doing more than is required of people in general, more than the tax collectors or the Gentiles do, more than they themselves do when they greet one another, they must look for perfection. *You* is emphatic. Jesus is not saying what the Gentiles ought to be or the Jews who do not follow him. He is referring to his followers; they must be *perfect.* That their standard is to be the highest possible (‘no limit to your goodness,’) is shown by the words that follow: *even as your heavenly Father is perfect.* . . . To set this kind of perfection before his followers means that Jesus saw them as always having something for which to strive. No matter how far along the path of Christian service we are, there is still something to aim for. There is a wholeheartedness about being Christian; all that we have and all that we are must be taken up into the service of the Father” (Morris, 133–134).

“The paragraph begun in v. 43 closes with a command that may equally summarize all six antitheses. ‘Perfect’ here is better translated as ‘mature, whole,’ . . . Jesus is not frustrating his hearers with an unachievable ideal but challenging them to grow in obedience to God’s will—to become more like him. J. Walvoord rightly observes, ‘While sinless perfection is impossible, godliness, in its biblical concept, is attainable.’ But such godliness cannot be comprehensively formulated in a set of rules; the ethics of the sermon are suggestive, not exhaustive” (Blomberg, C. [*Matthew*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nac22;ref=Bible.Mt5.48;off=5;ctx=5:48_~The_paragraph_begun_in_v._43_closes), 115).

“**Perfect** (τελειοι [*teleioi*]). The word comes from τελος [*telos*], end, goal, limit. Here it is the goal set before us, the absolute standard of our Heavenly Father. The word is used also for relative perfection as of adults compared with children” (Robertson, A. T. [*Word Pictures in the New Testament*](https://ref.ly/logosres/rwp;ref=Bible.Mt5.48;off=13;ctx=Matthew_5:48$0A~Perfect_($CF$84$CE$B5$CE$BB$CE$B5$CE$B9$CE$BF$CE$B9_$5Bteleioi$5D)), Mt 5:48).

The conclusion we must draw is that Jesus expects His Kingdom subjects to pursue perfection. The Law **was** made to be kept. And Paul claims that it is possible to keep the Law by those “who walk, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:4)

(**Theological**: What it means for God’s people **ALWAYS**)

**THE MATURE KINGDOM SUBJECT’S OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW** . . .

**MAINTAINS GOD’S MORAL MANDATES**,

(Matthew 5:17-48).

I. **Entrance into God’s Kingdom** . . . **demands the absolute fulfillment of His moral requirements**, (5:17-20). (See also, Matthew 3:15; Romans 3:19-26)

II. **A righteous observation of God’s moral requirements** . . . **demands moral perfection**, (5:21-48). (See also, Romans 7:22-25; 8:1-4)

(**Pedagogical**: What it means for us **TODAY**)

**KEEP GOD’S MORAL LAW**

[Not to earn salvation, but because, now, you can],

(Matthew 5:17-48).

I. Jesus came to fulfill the righteous requirements of the Law on your behalf, (5:17-20).

A. You could not keep God’s moral code, (20).

B. Entrance into God’s Kingdom demands absolute obedience to God’s moral code.

C. Jesus came to fulfill the righteous requirements of the Law on your behalf, (17-19). (Matthew 3:15; 28:20; Romans 3:19-26)

II. God’s righteous requirements demand an obedience beyond mere human capacity, (5:21-47). (Living at the “ceiling” of true, Spirit-dependent righteousness rather than the “floor” of self-righteousness)

A. God’s moral code demands no anger, but resolution of conflict, (21-26).

B. God’s moral code demands no lust, but sexual constraint, (27-30).

C. God’s moral code demands no divorce, but loyalty, (31-32).

D. God’s moral code demands no lying, but truth, (33-37).

E. God’s moral code demands no revenge, but grace, (38-42).

F. God’s moral code demands no hatred, but love (43-47).

III. **KEEP GOD’S MORAL LAW**, (5:48).

A. Jesus demands obedience from His Kingdom subjects.

B. Only through the Holy Spirit can Jesus’ Kingdom subjects keep His commandments more and more (perfectly). (Romans 7:22-25; 8:1-4)