

“The citizens of Jesus’ kingdom keep God’s law in their hearts.”

Matthew 5:21-37

²¹ **“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ ²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.**

²³ **“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.**

²⁵ **“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. ²⁶ I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.**

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 sin, 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 sin, 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.**

³¹ **“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ ³² But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.**

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.’ ³⁴ But 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.**

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

Sometimes little children, when they are telling a lie or making a promise that they do not intend to keep, will cross their fingers behind their back. The thought is this: “If I cross my fingers, then I do not have to tell the truth or keep my promise. Crossing my fingers releases me from having to do the right thing.” Children often do this playfully and sometimes show the person they are talking to that their fingers were crossed. However, as the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, even as adults we have many ways of trying to justify our own sins in our minds. Sinful mankind, with his cleverness, devises ways to free himself from having to do the right thing.

In Jesus' day, everyone looked up to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. Because they knew the Bible so well, prayed so many prayers, kept so many rules, and gave so many offerings, surely they deserved to go to heaven! But in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said,²⁰ **For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.** The Pharisees and teachers of the law were fooling the people and deceiving themselves, but God was not impressed with them. Their righteous acts were like filthy rags. What they called righteousness was really wickedness. They came close to God to worship Him with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him. They broke God's commandments, but stood before Him and claimed to have kept them. They found ways to justify their sins and continue in those sins. In worship it was as if they came before God with their fingers secretly crossed and said, "Lord, we love your law!"

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says that the true members of God's kingdom are different. Those who belong to Jesus have His perfect righteousness. They repent of their sins and receive forgiveness through the Savior. In the peace of forgiveness, they run in the paths of God's commands. As they travel through this world, the citizens of Jesus' kingdom treasure God's law in their hearts. Today, Jesus helps us understand the 5th, the 6th, and the 2nd commandments.

Part One: They keep the 5th commandment in their hearts.

We are not sure why Jesus starts with the 5th commandment. Maybe it is because so few people think they have broken it. "I certainly haven't murdered anyone!"²¹ **"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'**²² **But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.** Jesus did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. With these words, Jesus does not teach new things regarding the law or add to the law. Rather, He explains the true meaning of what God said through Moses. The 5th commandment does not speak about civil justice, but about our hearts as we stand before God. The 5th commandment forbids not only murder, but also sinful anger, hatred, and hurtful words. Anytime we add pain and sorrow to someone else's life, we break the 5th commandment. Bullying and verbal abuse are sins against this commandment. John, who was on that mountain when Jesus preached this sermon, later wrote, **"He who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him"** (1 John 3:15).

Jesus continues with a personal example.²³ **"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,"²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.** In Old Testament worship offerings and sacrifices were very important. In this way God was reminding the people of their sinfulness and their need for the Savior to come. In our New Testament worship, we do not have to offer these sacrifices, because Jesus the perfect and complete sacrifice for sin has already

come. The message of “redemption accomplished” is proclaimed to us through the Word and through the Lord’s Supper.

Even though our style of worship is different, Jesus’ words apply to us too. When we come to God’s house to hear the gospel and to call upon God’s name, if we remember that we have sinned against someone we should make it a priority to talk to them. We will not keep putting it off. We will go to them quickly and tell them that we have sinned against them and against God and that we want them to forgive us. This is a great way for us to keep the 5th commandment in our hearts, and to put it into practice in our lives.

“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. ²⁶ I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny. Because the members of Jesus’ kingdom love His law, they do not want to hold grudges against others, and they do not want to continue in stubborn impenitence. Christians know that they must stand before Christ on the Last Day. For that reason, throwing away their pride, they confess their sins to others and ask for forgiveness. If someone refuses to forgive us when we ask, that is not our responsibility. In such a case, knowing that we have done our best, we will entrust all things to God.

Part Two: They keep the 6th commandment in their hearts.

Jesus continues with the 6th commandment. 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 sin, 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 sin, 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.** Jesus explains the true meaning of the 6th commandment. Adultery includes all impure thoughts, words, and actions. The problem is not our body, but our heart. Gouging out our eyes or cutting off our hands will not solve the problem. Sinful thoughts, words, and actions come out of our sinful hearts! The citizens of God’s Kingdom do not stand before God and pretend that they have kept His commandments. Instead they confess their sins to Him, put their trust in the spotless Lamb of God, and pray that God would create a pure heart in them and help them to live a pure and decent life in words and actions.

As we study in the catechism, the 6th commandment protects God’s wonderful gift of marriage. God’s law forbids divorce, but because God knew the sinfulness of mankind, He allowed for divorce in the case of marital unfaithfulness. But the religious leaders in Jesus’ day came up with ways to justify divorce. As long as they followed the proper procedures, their divorce was acceptable, they thought. But Jesus says, ³¹ **“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ ³² But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.**

Because of sin, our marriages are not completely happy. Husbands do not always love their wife as they should. Wives do not always respect and support their husband as they should. In every marriage, husband and wife must confess their sins to each other and pray to God for help. In every marriage, husband and wife must talk to each other and work to serve each other. In this way the members of Jesus' kingdom honor marriage and keep the 6th commandment in their hearts. **“What God has joined together, let no one separate”** (Matthew 19:6).

But when someone divorces without just cause, that person has sinned against his or her spouse and against God. He (or she) has caused their spouse to look like an adulterer, and has caused the person who marries their spouse to look like an adulterer too. The citizens of Jesus' kingdom will do all they can to avoid such sins and the lifelong, bitter results that they cause. Instead of justifying their own sins, Christians will repent of them and ask for forgiveness.

Part Three: They keep the 2nd commandment in their hearts.

The religious leaders in Jesus' day were very clever. They devised different kinds of oaths and said that some were more binding than others. Jesus said to them, **“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.’³⁴ But 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.** What is the reason there are oaths? Is it not because mankind is unreliable? By taking an oath, the person is saying, “This time I am really telling the truth.” But think how often people tell lies and then promise or swear that they are telling the truth. They call on God to be their witness and to punish them if they are lying, and then they lie. They do this because they do not fear or love God.

As citizens of God's kingdom, we have been freed from the devil who is “the father of lies.” We do not want to speak his native language. Instead, as children of God, we want to walk in the light of God's truth, and speak the truth to each other in love. In all of our speaking, we will seek to give glory to God's name and treasure the 2nd commandment in our hearts. And when we fall into temptation and tell lies, we will quickly run to the God-man who preached this sermon. He did more than preach about righteousness; He is the Lord our righteousness, who lived a sinless life for us! When we sin, we will run to Him and ask Him to intercede for us before the Father. **“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth”** (1 Peter 2:22). **“He redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us”** (Galatians 3:13).

Because of Jesus and through faith in Him, we are and we remain citizens of the kingdom of heaven who sincerely study, ponder, and take God's law to heart. Amen.