*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

September 9 - 14

*Jesus Reveals the Spirit of the Old Testament Law*

**Monday, September 9 Matthew 5:21-26; Deuteronomy 5:1-6, 17**

*“You must not murder”*

Having just affirmed the abiding authority of the Law, Jesus now reveals the full meaning, or “spirit,” of the Law. “You have heard that it was said” to the generation being led by Moses, “but I say to you . . . !” He uses the emphatic first person. This places the declaration of Christ on the highest level of authority, on the level of the ultimate prophet of God, the Messiah. The Law that Jesus interprets here is the prohibition against killing. While killing is wrong, Jesus says anything that leads to killing is also wrong. It is not only the act that is to be avoided but the attitude of ill-will.

Jesus calls us to be free from anger. While one may say he has never killed, Jesus asks about the inner attitude of anger and hate, of destructive words and hostility. Anger wounds others and also warps the spirit of the one immersed in the feeling of wrath or indignation. We need to understand our feelings to be honest about them, but we must resolve anger in ways other than focusing on personalities and harboring destructive attitudes toward them.

*Instead of being angry with another, Lord, I will seek to be reconciled. Amen.*

**Tuesday, September 10 Matthew 5:27-30; Deuteronomy 5:1-6, 18**

*“You must not commit adultery”*

Jesus fills the commandment, “You must not commit adultery,” full of meaning by saying that whoever looks at another in order to lust is guilty of an adulterous heart. This passage is addressed to the married in its primary meaning, although the teaching on pure thoughts and respect for others is a valid secondary interpretation. Married or single, purity calls us to the highest regard for others, to see them as persons and not as bodies to be used for our pleasure.

Verses 29 and 30 emphasize how seriously the follower of Christ is to regard this problem. Anything that leads to lust should be given up. One regards sin so seriously as to prefer to lose an eye or a hand rather than to lose one’s self in sin. We should understand these statements attitudinally. This means taking literally the basic intent of the passage, rather than physically removing the eye. The loss of one eye or one hand cannot in itself prevent a lustful look or thought. The word-picture is to emphasize deliberate, decisive action in dealing with our propensity to sin.

*I choose to give up, Lord, those things that lead to lust. Amen.*

**Wednesday, September 11 Matthew 5:31-32; Deuteronomy 24:1-4**

*“Anyone who divorces his wife”*

Jesus refers to the pronouncement on certificates of divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1). Since divorce was widespread in the ancient world, God instituted a regulation through Moses that was designed to do three things: (1) protect the sanctity of marriage; (2) protect the woman from a husband who might send her away without any cause; (3) document her status as a legitimately divorced woman so she could remarry.

By Jesus’ time, the meaning of “he finds something indecent about her” in Deuteronomy 24:1 was being interpreted as “for any reason the man sees fit.” Against such frivolous reasoning for divorce, Jesus states that divorce creates the same breaking of the marriage covenant as does adultery. However, as did Moses, Jesus allows for an exception, for sometimes the marriage bond has been violated to such a degree that a spouse has already torn apart the marriage union. In such a case, divorce is allowed for it protects the nonoffending partner and it protects the institution of marriage from being a vulgar sham.

*May those who are married, Lord, live in harmony with one another. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

September 9 - 14

*Jesus Reveals the Spirit of the Old Testament Law*

**Thursday, September 12 Matthew 5:33-37; Leviticus 19:12; Deuteronomy 5:1-6, 11**

*“Do not swear any oaths”*

The disciple is to be honest and trustworthy, making the swearing of an oath unnecessary. One’s yes is to mean yes, and one’s no is to mean no. Whatever is needed beyond this is potentially evil, for one may be swearing by God in order to deceive. Here Jesus is correcting Jewish tradition which developed a hierarchy of values for swearing oaths, a pattern which made some statements more binding than others. If a person wasn’t really serious about an oath, he would swear by less sacred things, such as, “By heaven” or “By the earth” or “By Jerusalem” or “By my head.”

Instead, says Jesus, we should not swear oaths, invoking God’s name, or substitutes for it, to guarantee the truth of what we say. Jesus’ disciples should be people of such integrity of character and truthfulness of heart that whatever they say is absolutely believable and dependable. A person of integrity is one who in daily conversation is so truthful, genuine, and reliable that his or her words are believed without an oath.

*May I be known, Lord, as a person of integrity. Amen.*

**Friday, September 13 Matthew 5:38-42; Exodus 21:22-25; Leviticus 24:19-20**

*“Do not retaliate”*

Jesus refers to one of the oldest laws in the world, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. The law is known as the *Lex Talionis*. It is not only to be found in the Old Testament but is found in the Code of Hammurabi, the earliest known code of laws, which originated between 2285 and 2242BC. In early times, vengeance was a part of life, and if a man of one tribe wounded a man of another, the result was revenge by the tribe of the wounded man on the members of the tribe of the offender. The intent of *Lex Talionis* was to limit vengeance.

Jesus wants us to be free from having our behavior determined by the way we are treated. The disciple is to live by the higher law of love and thereby respond to the treatment he receives from others in a manner reflecting the freedom and love of Christ. This love was ultimately expressed by Jesus on the cross, where he showed the deepest love to his enemies and extended forgiveness to all. Jesus’ teaching prohibits retaliation and prescribes the way of love, moving us from negativism to a positive course of action.

*May you, Lord, not others, determine my behavior. Amen.*

**Saturday, September 14 Matthew 5:43-48; Leviticus 19:18**

*“Love your enemies”*

Jesus quotes one of the central truths of the Old Testament: “Love your neighbor.” However, the next statement of the antithesis, “hate your enemy,” is not found in the Old Testament. In fact, Moses directed the people to assist an enemy in need (Exodus 23:4-5). The call to hate one’s enemy came about by identifying “neighbor” exclusively with those within the Jewish community. Thus, anyone outside that community, that is, a Gentile, was not one’s neighbor. More than likely the Gentile had somehow become one’s enemy and did not need to be loved but could be hated.

But Jesus takes the competing attitudes of love for neighbor and hate for enemy and brings them together in a way that undoubtedly stunned his audience but is actually what God intended from the beginning. God’s intent is to bring reconciliation between people, and Jesus’ disciples are to look at people in this world as God does and to love them enough to reach out to them with the message of reconciliation, even to “pray for those who persecute” them as Jesus’ disciples.

*I will love those who are hard for me to love, Lord, and so follow your example. Amen.*