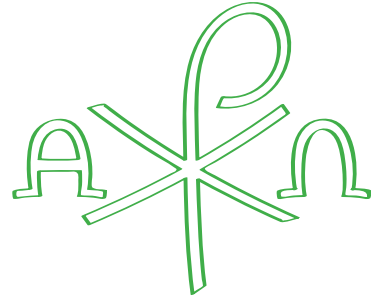


# THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Derrick C. Brown



## Matthew 5:20–26 ESV

### Author and Date:

Matthew Levi the Apostle and Evangelist around AD 50. This is a portion of Jesus' great Sermon on the Mount.

<sup>20</sup> **“For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.**

- The scribes and Pharisees spent their lives striving for righteousness. They dressed in a religious fashion. They studied the Scriptures daily. They conducted the affairs of the temple and synagogue. Often set apart at birth, their lives were ones lived in outward observance of their religion.
- The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was an external righteousness. As Christ elsewhere says: “Well did Isaiah prophesy of [them], when he said: ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’” (Matthew 15:7–9) The scribes and Pharisees honored man’s traditions over God’s Commandments. They were not concerned with faith or the Divine Promise. Instead, they were concerned with human praise and worldly glory. They wanted to be known as religious, in order that men would honor and respect them. Such a religion is useless. (James 1:26) For honor and respect are first due to God, as the holy Law of God commands. (Matthew 22:37b; see also Deuteronomy 6:5)
- The righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees is the righteousness of the perfect heart. It is the righteousness of the right motive, the pure desire, the perfect love, and the

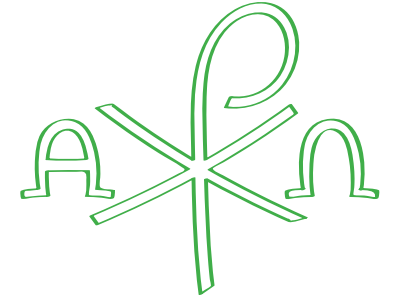
generous spirit. It is the righteousness that seeks not its own benefit, but always and only the benefit of the neighbor. It is a righteousness that covers up what would shame or bring the neighbor into disgrace. It is a righteousness that rejoices in helping the neighbor out of the trouble he is in. This is the righteousness that is needed. Jesus says that if one does not have such a righteousness, one cannot enter into God’s kingdom.

- Such a righteousness, a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, is nowhere to be found within the self. As the hymnist put it: *“It was a false, misleading dream That God His Law had given That sinners could themselves redeem And by their works gain heaven. The Law is but a mirror bright To bring the inbred sin to light That lurks within our nature.”* (LSB 555)
- If such a righteousness cannot be found within oneself, then it follows that righteousness before God must be found outside oneself. And if this righteousness is to be valid before God; if it is to open heaven, then it must have testimony from God. God be praised, He has provided it! The Way is Christ, who has become our righteousness before God. (1 Corinthians 1:30; Jeremiah 23:6d) This is why St. Paul can speak the wonderful words: “To the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.” (Romans 4:5)
- Thus, our Confessions assert: “Our churches teach that people cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works. People are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their

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sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. By His death, Christ made satisfaction for our sins. God counts this faith for righteousness in His sight (Romans 3 and 4 [3:21–26; 4:5])." (*Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, Augsburg Confession, Article IV, 33)

**<sup>21</sup> You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'**

- "In the fifth commandment they considered that the word 'kill' meant merely to murder some one with the hand. Thus they made a hand out of the word 'thou;' and in the same manner they made out of the word 'kill,' that which produced a carcass." (Martin Luther, *Explanatory Notes on the Gospels*, 16)
- "The world does not regard it a sin or injustice for any one to be angry, when he is unjustly injured, and it is true, that such a one has rights against the person who has injured him; he can also justly appeal to the judge, and call for help. But he does too much, when he adds his wrath and avenges himself, and out of small justice a much greater injustice will be done." (Ibid.)

**<sup>22</sup> But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.**

- Jesus unpacks "the fullness of God's intention in giving the commandment against unjustly taking the life of another. You can murder someone in your heart or with your words. Bitter insults partake the same poisonous root as murder itself, and there is no essential difference in the sight of God; murder, anger, and bitter insults all can lead down the road to eternal damnation." (Jeffrey Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 283)

**<sup>23</sup> So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.**

- "He means, 'God will not take pleasure in any good work when it is done in anger, hatred, and spite.' And here Christ mentions the offering because making an offering was a work of the heart, and a great act of worship commanded by God in the Old Testament.

So whatever was said about the offering of the Jews He also wished to relate to prayer and other good works. In short, no worship is pleasing to God unless you have been reconciled and come to terms with those who have been injured by you." (Johann Spangenberg, *The Christian Year of Grace*, 264)

**<sup>25</sup> Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. <sup>26</sup> Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny."**

- "He means, 'If you have been injured by someone, and you are asked for forgiveness, you are obligated to forgive,' as Christ did when He said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do' [Luke 23:34]. But even if you are not asked, be ready to forgive, and quickly, while the anger is still fresh and young, lest it result in long-lasting hatred. Do not let the sun go down on your anger [Eph. 4:26]. Since we are not sure how long we will live, we should not put off reconciliation from day to day, from year to year, but be reconciled and come to terms immediately while living here. However, if you are not reconciled, your own conscience will accuse and testify against you on the Last Day, so that you will be handed over to the judge, and then to the executioner, and not come out of prison until you have paid the last farthing, that is to say, never for eternity. For in hell there is no deliverance [Job 7:9]. Therefore let every man make sure that he is found in Christian righteousness, that is, in true faith and in brotherly love, is not angry, does not curse, has no ill will, does not injure anyone's wife, child, servant, livestock, property, honor, or reputation, but keeps the peace with everyone, and settles, is reconciled, and comes to terms with all his enemies and accusers, that his prayer and worship may be acceptable to God, and of use for obtaining God's grace here and eternal life hereafter." (Ibid., 265)



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