

**The Gospel According to
St. Matthew 5:21-26
Jim's Notes
July 12, 2006**

St. Hilary of Poitiers (died A.D. 368)

“Whoever says to his brother, ‘*Raca*,’ shall be liable to the council.” One who reproaches with empty-headedness someone who is filled with the Holy Spirit becomes liable to the council of holy men and is to expiate this outrage against the Holy Spirit through punishment handed down by the holy judges. “Whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be liable to the hell of fire.” . . . Thus whatever the law has not condemned as to a person’s works, the faith of the Gospels castigates because of one’s readiness simply to use insulting words. (*On Matthew* 4.17).\

St. Augustine of Hippo (died A.D. 430)

What are we to do? “Whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be liable to the hell of fire.” But “no human being can tame the tongue.” Will everyone therefore go to the hell of fire? By no means. “Lord, you have become our refuge from generation to generation.” Your wrath is just. You send no one to hell unjustly. “Where shall I go from your spirit? or where shall I flee from your presence,” (Psalm 139:7) unless to you? Thus let us understand, my dearly beloved, that if no human being can tame the tongue, we must take refuge in God, who will tame it. Does your own human nature prevent you from taming your tongue?” No human being can tame the tongue” (James 3:8).

Consider this analogy from the animals that we tame. A horse does not tame itself; a camel does not tame itself; an elephant does not tame itself; a snake does not tame itself; a lion does, not tame itself. So too a man does not tame himself. In order to tame a horse, an ox, a camel, an elephant, a lion and a snake, a human being is required. Therefore God should be required in order for a human being to be tamed. (*Sermon* 55.2)

St. Chromatius of Aquileia (died A.D. 407)

How greatly the Lord esteems fraternal love we know from this, for he makes clear that a gift offered to God is not acceptable unless the giver of a gift to his brother puts aside his anger and becomes reconciled to him.

Furthermore, we learn that the gifts offered by Cain were rejected by God. He failed to observe charity toward his brother and harbored anger in his heart. Hence, not without good reason does the Lord in the Gospel indicate in many places the prime necessity of fraternal charity when he says, “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another” (John 13:34).

And again: “By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Rightly so, the Lord also spoke through Zechariah: “Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy each to his brother” (Zechariah 8:16-17). Through David he likewise declared: “Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath!” (Psalm 37:8). (*Tractate on Matthew* 21.3.1-3)

The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (The Didache), c. A.D. 80.

On the Lord's Day of the Lord gather together, break bread and give thanks, after confessing your transgressions so that your sacrifice may be pure. Let no one who has a quarrel with his neighbor join you until he is reconciled, lest your sacrifice be defiled. For this is that which was proclaimed by the Lord: "In every place and time let there be offered to me a clean sacrifice. For I am a Great King," says the Lord, "and my name is wonderful among the gentiles" (Malachi 1:11). (*Didache* 14,1)

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (died A.D. 386)

The deacon cries out: "Take note one of another and bid one another welcome!" Do not suppose that this kiss is like those given by mutual friends in the market-place. Such a kiss this is not. This kiss blends souls one with another, and woos for them forgetfulness of every injury. This kiss, then, is a sign of the intermingling of souls and of the banishment of every remembrance of injury. It was in this regard that Christ said: "If you are offering your gift at the altar, and while there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and go out first and be reconciled to your brother; then come up and offer your gift (Matthew 5:23-24)" The kiss, therefore, is reconciliation, and because of this it is holy. Just so, where the blessed Paul cried out, saying: "Bid one another welcome in a holy kiss" (I Thessalonians 5:26) and Peter, "In a kiss of charity" (I Peter 5:14). (*Catechetical Lecture 23, On the Mysteries* 5, 3)

St. John Chrysostom (died A.D. 407)

Having mentioned first the judgment, then the council, then hell, and having spoken of his own sacrifice, Jesus then adds, "Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court." That is, don't be saying, "What if I am the injured party? What if I have been plundered and dragged before the tribunal?" Even this kind of circumstance fails to qualify as an excuse or occasion for refusing to be reconciled. Jesus commands us even in these circumstances not to be at enmity with others. Then, since this command was so significant, he illustrates his counsel with examples drawn from daily affairs. Less intelligent people, after all, are more apt to respond to present realities than future ones. "What is that you are saying?" he asks. "So your adversary is stronger and has wronged you? He will wrong you even more if you don't make it right and he ends up taking you to court. In the former case, by giving up some money, you keep yourself free. Once a judge has passed sentence, however, you will be thrown in jail and pay a stiff fine. If you stay out of court, you will reap two benefits. First, you won't have to suffer anything painful. Second, the good you end up doing will be your own doing and not something you have been forced to do. But if you refuse to be convinced by these words, you are wronging yourself more than your opponent." (*The Gospel of Matthew, Homily*, 16.10.31)

St. Chromatius of Aquileia (died A.D. 407)

Others, who seem to have a more complete explanation, believe that the opponent here must be understood as the Holy Spirit, who opposes the vices and desires of the flesh. As the apostle points out, "The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, so that you do not do what you would" (Galatians 5:17).

The Spirit indeed desires heavenly things; the flesh lusts after earthly things. The Spirit rejoices over spiritual gifts; the flesh is attracted to bodily vices. Concerning this the apostle says, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you have been sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30). Therefore, the Lord instructs us to listen to this adversary of sin and human error, upholding those things that are righteous and holy. We should obey him in all things while we are with him on the way, in the caravan of this present life. By doing so we will have peace and perpetual fellowship with him. (*Tractate on Matthew* 22.3.1-2.34)