Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Matthew is writing to people who understand the Old Testament and tries to give his commentary in the light of Christ. In today’s narrative he does this by letting us hear Jesus giving a much fuller understanding of why God made the laws along with the intent behind each of these laws. Jesus knows that people can avoid the extreme sins but he intensifies and interiorizes them by including attitudes and emotions. The commandments are a gift of grace to guide us in our daily lives as we live in community and as we have relationships with others. When we are in sin we do not have a right relationship with God and we need to ask for forgiveness. When Jesus says “but I say to you” he is not doing away with that law nor adding his own beliefs but he helps us to understand God’s intent behind each law. When God said “thou shall not murder” that sounds like a good basic law that allows us to live in relationship with one another and with God. Imagine a world where killing in day to day circumstances is OK. But Jesus goes deeper into this and explains this when he says we should not become angry enough to murder - if we do we have committed murder in our heart. The religious leaders felt righteous because they felt that they had not murdered anyone, however, they we angry enough to plot and indirectly cause the death of Jesus. They can self-righteously argue their hands were clean. But Jesus does not let them and their self-righteous attitude off the hook. It is not only the killing which is a sinful but also anger they had towards Jesus because it violates Jesus commandment to love. Anger that can be a boiling, brooding bitterness against someone can be a dangerous emotion which can leap out of control which can lead to physical violence, emotional violence and spiritual damage. Think about road rages incidents we have observed or read about from time to time or see on videos. Often times, both parties are angry which can lead to senseless violence. An attitude of forgiveness would go a long way in avoiding these situations.

Broken relationships can put a barrier between God and ourselves. If we have a problem with someone, we should resolve those differences quickly between ourselves. With mass media and streaming, etc. differences are often played out in front of many people which makes it more difficult to reconcile with one another. If we claim to love God but yet hate others we are being hypocrites. Look at how much hate there is in our world. Turn on your TV or go online or check out how there is constant conflict between people. As a Christian we should be above hating someone because of their opinions, worldview, familial connections, social status, appearance, etc. etc. We should instead concentrate on ways to reconcile with others. There were debtor prisons in Jesus time where someone who could not pay a debt could be thrown into prison. The reality is someone, usually family, would pay the debt until they could be released. Otherwise, the debtor would die in prison. Where is the love and forgiveness in this? But in forgiveness we experience the grace that we receive from a God of unlimited love and grace.

It is best to resolve our disagreements so they do not become much larger. Proverbs 25:8-10

8  do not hastily bring into court,

for[a] what will you do in the end,

when your neighbor puts you to shame?

9 Argue your case with your neighbor directly,

and do not disclose another’s secret,

or else someone who hears you will bring shame upon you,

and your ill repute will have no end.

Our courts have to deal with many issues (property line disputes, lake access, easements, etc.) between friends and neighbors that could not be dealt with before they get to court so the court rules on the resolution. Both parties lose out on the amount of money they pay but also on creating an adversarial relationship versus forgiving relationship.

Jesus also talks about lust and how it is wrong to have relations with someone else besides one spouse, like that depicted in movies so often. Jesus says even the desire to have this is sin. If the act is wrong so is the intention. It is all about trust which is the basis for a strong marriage.It is natural to be attracted to other people but having fantasies about someone other than your spouse is sinful and ultimately damaging to your relationship and is related to the next item.

Finally, we come to marriage. It is God’s intent we carry out the covenant when we legally married to our partner. We are supposed to live out our commitment to the other person. Trust is the bond that keeps marriage together. This is the one that strikes many people the hardest because so many have been divorced. It seems harsh because someone who divorces causes the other person in new relationships to commit adultery. We all fall short of the glory of God. Only Christ is able to follow the commandments as God intends. The good news is that God born in a manger enters the messiness of life in all its dimensions, continually seeking to heal us and to save us. Because of our belief in Christ we are open to God’s love and grace and will be found righteous. To assist us in having the right attitude we come to worship as we hear these words, to pray for strength to live God’s ways, and to share in the meal of forgiveness where the body of Jesus gives us strength and keeps us in his grace. Amen