

*Just because someone can quote the Bible, it doesn't mean they love what Jesus loves.* Just because someone can quote the Bible, it doesn't mean they are ready to be quoting the Bible. And, frankly, that has probably included almost everyone.

*But we can only start where we can start.* We can only begin where we are. We all start out, as the apostle Paul could say, as *spiritual infants*. There is no shame in that at all. And to some degree, we all have some spiritual infancy hanging around with us still. No one completely grows up, evenly and completely, I don't think.

Where it really becomes a problem however is when Christians *think* they are spiritually advanced but they really are *not* at all—which is why Paul had to write that whole letter to the church in Corinth. There were some super spiritual people there who were very conversant in spiritual wisdom and had some impressive spiritual gifts like speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing. But in fact they were caught up in jealousy and quarreling and selfish behavior. There was a *disconnect* there and they could not see it. It was obvious to Paul that they were still, in fact, spiritual infants because *they had not gone yet to where Jesus wanted them to go*—to the hard places within themselves, out of which jealousy and quarreling and selfishness come.

*This is in fact the whole point of the teachings today from the Sermon on the Mount. But this is not what we have usually heard.* Instead we have had the Bible quoted to us here in ways that have actually harmed us. Or we ourselves have read these passages on our own when we did not yet have the spiritual maturity to receive them--and we have harmed ourselves in our spiritual infancy. I guess this is to some extent unavoidable. This is what we do—clergy and everybody. But I think it is also important to just lay it out on the table and name it.

So even when I read again this week these teachings from Jesus, old memories of my own began to resurface again—ways these teachings have been inappropriately told to me and ways I understood them myself in former times when I did not understand them *but thought I did*. And so, once again, I had to engage these old memories—it seems they never go away--*and engage again the struggle of hearing what Jesus actually meant and loving what Jesus loves.*

Maybe some of my old memories of the Sermon on the Mount may also be familiar to you too? These old voices say that *anger* in itself is bad and that it should be *repressed*. That Christians should be careful to never use the word “fool”. That if someone has harmed *me* that it is *my* responsibility to go and make myself vulnerable to *further harm* from them in hopes of being reconciled. That *sexual desire* in itself is unChristian. That you may need to be *cruel* to yourself in order to be Christian. That divorce is *always* wrong. That I should never ever use swear words. *But...none of this...is what Jesus is actually talking about.*

Instead, in Jesus' teaching on the importance of the moral commandments, he is inviting us to become more spiritually mature and not just stop with the commandments, as important as they in fact are. But it is crucial that we risk *knowing our own hearts* because what goes on inside of us really *matters*. It is crucial that we struggle within ourselves with the vexing challenges of being human beings. And that includes the difficulty we all face of navigating our own anger...seeking appropriate reconciliation...sorting out what we can have and what we cannot have...anguishing over when to keep holding onto a person and when we have to let them go...and struggling with the importance of telling the truth.

These are hard places within ourselves to go, and they are easy places to avoid. Yet Jesus wants us to go within our hearts, to these hard places, *willingly*. Because it is only from within ourselves...that repentance may be discovered. And it is only from within--in the secret places of our own *struggle*--where we may come to love what Jesus loves.