

Series	Sermon on the Mount
Study	Study 4
Topic	Jesus and the law
Reference	Matthew 5
Speaker	Dr Peter Ng

Welcome to this final session on the beatitudes in this Gamma series on the Sermon on the Mount. So we're going to be dealing with blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. Now the Christians are the most persecuted group in the entire world, many countries persecute them, especially those countries in the 10/40 windows, which are basically the Islamic countries. As you can see, the most violent and most severe persecution happens in Pakistan, Nigeria, Egypt, Central African Republic and most severe ones are North Korea where many people actually lose their lives. The rate of persecution is quite phenomenal. Every day eight Christians are killed for their faith. Every week 182 churches or Christian buildings are attacked. Every month 309 Christians are in prison unjustly. 260 million Christians suffer high to severe levels of persecution all over world.

There are many reasons for persecution and one of the chief reasons is the competition for power. Whenever you have a large group believing in a particular faith with different values from the established authorities, they will feel that their authority has been challenged. So therefore they will feel uncomfortable and this has happened in mainland China. There's a purge against Christians underway because the number of Christians now far outnumber the number of members of the Chinese communist party and Christians had different value system. So therefore they are being persecuted. In fact in Asia two in the five Asians now face high levels of persecution. Pastor in Christian churches in China are being forced to put up surveillance cameras in their church building so that people can be easily identify and tracked down.

Now the other reason for persecution is that it is a threat to existing religions. So if you are, especially those, Christians in 10/40 window where Islam is fairly intolerant to the presence of other religions, they are persecuted. In our own country, we have got Pastor Raymond Koh, Pastor Joshua Hilmy, both missing for years with no resolution to what happened to them. So we need to continue to pray and these are examples of persecution within our own country. The third reason for persecution is that Christians have different value system. They are a counterculture to whichever prevailing culture of country in which they are persecuted. For example, in South America where the drug cartels rule over the favelas or the slums, Christian pastors and leaders will preach about Liberty, about love, a community spirit, and freedom from drugs. And so therefore the drug cartels, they have their power challenged. So therefore they will lash out and persecute Christians. Even in westernized countries, supposed to be allegedly Christian country like Australia, we have a case of Dr Jereth Kok, who is an excellent GP in Melbourne, who was basically just out of the blue suspended for medical practice in Victoria. Why? Because somebody in the Victoria Medical Board decided to investigate him without any complaint at all. He found out he had an excellent report with his patients. Never did anything wrong, excellent medical record, but as they troll through his social media, they found he had very strident, conservative views. He was against termination of pregnancy, gender dysphoria and LGBTQ areas, which was at odds with many people from that particular medical practice In Victoria. And because of that, he was actually suspended. Now that's an example of standing up for righteousness, standing up for Christian views and having to pay the price even in an allegedly Christian country.

Other reasons for persecution is that you actually have a new identity and identity in many countries are tied up to ethnicity. And so therefore this threatens the prevailing ethnic group. Lastly, we have persecution because light always shows up darkness. John chapter three 3 verse 19 says,

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

So people who love darkness and do wicked things hate the light and people who bring the lights. So that is why you actually have a lot of persecution. Indeed Paul writes a 2-Timothy 3:12,

12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

So if we decide to follow the beatitudes, if we decide that it is more blessed to hunger and thirst for righteousness, to be merciful, to be pure in heart, we will be persecuted and that is what Paul says.

The ultimate reason why Christians are being persecuted is that this is a spiritual battle and a foe that we actually have to confront is the devil, which is described by 1 Peter chapter 5 as a roaring lion seeking to devour us.

We're called to be the salt and light of the world. Matthew 5 verses 13-14.

13 "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

So here's the metaphor. The main metaphor here is salt, which gives flavored food, fertilizers in small doses, but mainly a preservative mixed in with food, especially meat. So they can keep for long time because they didn't have refrigerators in those days. If it leaches out, it's no good. It's thrown up on the roof and it fills up cracks on the roof and roads. We're called to be the moral disinfectant of the world. And so therefore as the world deteriorates in terms of its morality, we are there to stand up and to stop the deterioration of society.

We're called to be that city on a Hill. If you actually put a city or a village on a hill and the lights could be seen for miles and miles and miles. It just absolutely stands out. We actually live in a world today where we don't actually appreciate it because we've got lights everywhere. We actually have this issue called light pollution. Now if you were in a small town in those days, nestled in a valley or on top of the hill, there are not much lights everywhere else and a light of a city on a hill in those days would be so distinctive. It would be shinning and you couldn't absolutely miss it. And that metaphor is designed to show the, as Christians, we come into the cracks of a broken world. We go to where the worst things happen and we minister the glory of Christ.

And in fact, we minister Jesus to those in prison, to those who are sick. Matthew 25

35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'

So many of these prison ministry is actually started by Christians all over the world. What about the ones who are sick? The first pandemic in the Christian area was the end Antonine Plague in AD 165 to 180 of smallpox, where a quarter of the Roman population was actually killed. Then there was the plague of Cyprian AD 249 to 271 and this was possibly small pop or Ebola type virus at a time. And here is how Dionysus of Alexandria witnessed pagans who reacted to this plague.

At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead and treating unburied corpses as dirt, hoping thereby to avert the spread and contagion of the fatal disease; but do what they might, they found it difficult to escape.

This is what the pagans did, but this is what Christians did.

Most of our brother-Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of the danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains.

Here you can see Christians rising to the occasion on these pandemics and each time with a pandemic, there is actually a surge of people becoming Christians because they were the salt of the earth and the light on the hill.

Finally, we have Martin Luther, Bubonic plague. In his own town of Wittenberg. He encouraged Christian to stay behind, to minister to the poor and the marginalized and the sick of Bubonic plague. And in fact, he stayed behind and as a result he lost his daughter Elizabeth to the plague because he stayed behind as well.

Well, if you look at all these beatitudes, there's a perfect description of Jesus Christ. Jesus was humble and meek. Jesus hunger and thirst for righteousness. Jesus was persecuted. Well, if you look, if that's a perfect description of Jesus, the only way we are going to reflect Jesus is when we have the Holy Spirit within us. If you look here, the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These are the qualities of the spirit that will allow us the kind of spiritual transformation that will happen in our lives so that we could reflect Jesus and when we reflect Jesus, which is the ultimate calling our life we will actually experience true blessedness. We will be in that place where we were designed to be. We were designed to reflect God.

Reading Matthew 5 verses 18 onwards to 26.

Matthew 5:18-20 (ESV) (ESV) Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the

kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.. 21 You have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' 22 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. 23 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 25 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. 26 Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. 27 "You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery.'

So in this section of Matthew chapter 5, we'll be dealing with Jesus and the law. From verses 21 to 22. Jesus is reaffirming the law, the importance of it, how we need to keep it, but on the other hand versus 23 onwards to 26, he is actually elaborating on the spirit of the law. Keeping the law or fulfilling is not that simple. It's only Jesus who can actually fulfill it. Now, the first thing he is talking about is anger. Anger is a very common emotion. All of us that angry, but Jesus raises the stakes. He says that, you know, there's a commandment that you shouldn't murder someone, but he's equating getting angry and calling someone a fool equals to a murderer. This is what the Bible says.

22 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.

So if murder now escalated equal to anger. Now didn't Jesus himself get angry. John chapter 2, he went into the temple. He found the traders who were trading there and he took out his whip and he whipped them and drove them out. He was angry. What about God? Romans chapter one, Paul describes God,

Romans 1: (ESV) 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth

So is anger that wrong? Well, there are some clues to the context of what Jesus is saying. He says, it is not only anger. He says, if you say to your brother, you fool. The actual word is a Hebrew word is 'Raca'. It means a fool or worthless, someone who is worthless, who is really nobody and this is more than an insult. It actually betrays an underlying contempt of the person as if the person is absolutely worthless. And so therefore there's a difference between Jesus anger and our anger. Jesus anger is never to belittle people. It is always done out of love and concern about what they're doing to themselves. It is righteous anger against perpetrators of evil. Our anger is completely different. It's to condemn, to belittle other people, it is done out of our pride, ego and resentment because somebody else hurt us. It is against people who oppose our plans and our ways. So Jesus's anger and our anger are completely different. Why does he actually therefore link murder and anger together?

Well it's because we are made in the image of God. Every person is basically like two seeds or acorn. One falls on the concrete, it doesn't grow. One falls on the soil, it has got all the nutrients and it grows into a big tree, but both of them actually have the DNA, potential for life. So when we are actually insulting someone and calling them 'RACA', you are actually insulting the image of God. So Jesus wants us to treat every person as if they've got infinite value. That's why he equates murder

with anger and insulting. So actually he's actually raised the stakes. So obviously there has been some misunderstanding as to what the nature of the law, the way the Pharisees saw it and the way Jesus saw it. Now let's go back in a bit of history, a bit of background of what the law is. The law, or called the Torah in Hebrew and in Greek it's Nomos. It is God's commandments and requirements to be fulfilled, carried out and given to Moses at Mount Sinai. And what is the law? The law is actually the delineation of God's character. The Lord tells us what God is like, and then when it tells you what God is like and since you are his children, you have to become like who he is.

So it tells us what it means to be living in this image. It's a design, a optimal design for our lives. And if you live in the Old Testament times, you had three broad categories of the law. The first broad category is basically ceremonial law, which governs of clean foods and unclean foods, which you could take and how you cleanse up before you go to temple to worship and when you go to temple, what kind of sacrifices you could give for the absolution of your sin? Remission of your sin. It always involves some sort of blood sacrifice to basically teach the people of Israel that without the shedding of blood, there's no remission of sins. And all of these sacrifices actually are shadow of what to come and the real reality that come was actually Jesus Christ, who sacrificed life for them. So that's the ceremonial law. The civil law govern what penalties were involved in terms of civil life of the Israel, because Israel was a theocracy, where both religion and secular all joined together in the government. And the third one was the moral law which is 10 commandments, all the principles that reveal the nature and the will of God.

There are 613 laws, cashewistic laws, which cover the ceremonial and civil parts and the 10 is the Ten Commandments. Now what was the relationship of Israel to the law? Did Israel keep the law in order to be safe? Let's look at when the law was first given in Exodus. Did the law come before salvation or after? Let's read Exodus 19:4

You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."

Now, you got it, right at the beginning you will find in Exodus 19, God saved the people of Israel and then they got the law. They never got the law and obeyed in order for God to decide to save them. I mean, they weren't slaving away in Egypt, trying to be obedient and when they reach a certain mark, they God say, Oh, well, I'll give you the 10 plagues and I'll save you. No, they were slaves. They were tortured. They had no merit at all. God decided to save them first and because they were saved and bought into the Sinai desert, it was at the Sinai desert where God says in verse 5, now therefore. If you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured possession.

So therefore the law came after salvation. So you do not obey the law in order to be safe. And the Pharisees made this fundamental mistake. Let's read on. We actually in the Old Testament are saved by grace and not merit based on the covenant. Let's look at Deuteronomy chapter 9 verse 4.

Duet 9: 4 Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you. 5 Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before

you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

So Deuteronomy 9 is very clear. Twice it said, they were not saved because they were righteous. They were not saved because they were obedient. They were not saved because they were clever people. It was not because of their merit. It was because of the evilness of the inhabitants of Canaan, God had to punish them and chase them out. So therefore you bring them in and covenant. God was faithful to his covenant because they were the offspring of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It was never due to their merit.

Now the Pharisees have a legalistic distortion. They thought that I could obey the law in order to be saved rather than obeying the law as a consequence of salvation. So they formed a merit base performance based on self-effort and narrowed the law to basically the letter of the law. If you just follow the letter of the law as long, for example, take commands. I haven't murdered anybody recently, have you have you had any adultery with somebody else? If I've done that, I'm okay. That's why Paul could say it in Philippians chapter 3 verse 5,

a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless

Remember the rich young man who came to Jesus and he said he fulfilled all the aspects of law. Yes, the letter of the law, but the problem is, is more than the letter of law. Jesus has set an example of, you don't have to murder, you just have to hate somebody and that's because it underlie not only the letter of the law, there is also the spirit of the law. Matthew 25, lust. Jesus said,

Matt 5:27 You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart

So the letter of law says, well you shall not have sex with another woman. But if you have sex with her in your mind, which is even deeper as a spirit, that's what the spirit of the law is about, fidelity to your wife. So that's actually a much higher standard. That's why verse 20, Jesus says,

Matthew 5:20 (ESV) For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

So if you want to have performance base obedience to the law, you actually have to have two, you have to have the letter of the law plus the spirit of the law, which is a whole lot bigger. It's like you carrying a kind of weight on one hand the letter of the lord, on the other hand the spirit of law. And it's so difficult to do that to performance based salvation because couple of things. Well, first of all, there is no immediate reward. You could be very faithful or obedient and good and yet bad things could happen to, you could get COVID-19, you could get cancer and when you find that you don't get your return pro quo, many of us will not be obedient anymore. That's number one. Number two, self-effort always is motivated by pride. And then it leads to hypocrisy, because you have to keep up your front and also you look down at others with contempt. Galatians 3:21

Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. 22 But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Galatians is very clear. There is a system of the law and the Pharisees have mistakenly taken performance, obedience of law as to where or which could get eternal life. But Jesus says that's not the way. The function or law was with the letter of the law and the spirit of the law to actually convict people and point people to what an ultimate sacrifice that could be made. And that sacrifice is Jesus. And we have to trust in Jesus for salvation rather than rewards. Galatians 3:23,

Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. 24 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith

Verse 23 of Galatians describes the law metaphorically like a guardian. It takes a child and points him into the direction of Jesus so that we might, you see in verse 24. So the law was our guardian until Christ came in order that we might be justified by faith. So the Law so captivates us and points out the fact that we cannot be saved by performance, so that we have to turn to Jesus who can save us and saving us by faith in his sacrifice. Romans 6:12

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. 13 Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

So it's clear, Paul clearly says that we are no longer living under the law. We're now under a new dispensation, we are under grace. Romans chapter 10,

Rom 10: 1 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. 3 For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

What does this mean? As believers in Christ, we are saved by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ through his grace. We are not saved by the works of the law. And let's look very carefully in this verse in Romans. Christ is the end of the law. The Greek word 'TELOS', it means the end as well as the goal. The goal of the law is to point us to Christ. And when Christ comes, the law ends. The whole purpose of law is to point us towards Christ. So let's get back to Matthew chapter 5.

Matthew 5:18-20 Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets;

It is not that the law has ended. The law has fulfilled its function. It points us to Jesus, but when Jesus comes, Jesus is the fulfillment, because Jesus came to fulfill the law. Jesus lived a perfect life. Every aspect of the law, all 613 of them and the moral code as well, Jesus kept it perfectly. The letter of the law, the spirit of the law, He lived a righteous life that we should have lived. And only that, when on the cross, the ceremonial law. Remember all the animals sacrificed. He was the ultimate sacrifice. All the animals, the shedding of their blood did not cause any sin to be forgiven, they are just shadows pointing to the ultimate reality that it was the blood of Jesus, the lamb of God on the cross that actually saved us from our sins. He has not only lived a life that was pure as a pure lamb but he also died the death that we should have died. So when the law, when Christ comes, the law ends as it were. Romans chapter 7 verse 6.

Romans 7: 6 But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

Paul is very clear, Romans chapter 6, we no longer under the law. We're no longer under the stipulations of the law. We now have a new way in which we exhibit our faith. It is through a new way of the spirit, not the old way of the written code, which actually means the old way of the Old Testament law. For example, Colossians chapter 2 verse 16,

Col 2: 16 Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ

So therefore the old covenant where there is the Mosaic Law, where you are particular about what you eat or drink, what festivals you actually regard or even the celebrating the Sabbath, which is actually on a Saturday. We are no longer under that ordinance. These things are shadow, which means they actually give us a clue of what the real thing is to come. The real substance actually belongs to Christ. When Christ comes, he supersedes all of that. So the Old Testament law no longer applies. That's why in Romans 14:20 Paul says,

20 Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean,

Last time you got certain foods, which were cleans, certain foods were unclean. Now look here.

Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. ... 23 But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

So now we are now guided by grace. We're not bounded by the letter of law to obey food laws. So when we eat and we have doubt and we are not eating for the glory of God. We are condemned when we eat out of faith, that is not sin. So we're in a new situation. Every believer in Jesus Christ is now under the new covenant. It's a new promise, God makes with us through his son Jesus Christ. The people of Israel lived under the Old Covenant governed by the law. We don't live under that anymore. The law has passed. When God looks at us, he only sees Jesus. He sees Jesus because Jesus has fulfilled the ceremonial part of the law, the entire law, moral, ceremonial, he has fulfilled it entirely, both the letter and the spirit and God is satisfied and what is our relationship now with this law. Well, the law, our relationship with the law changes. The law now becomes a guide, it teaches us what God is like and it helps us become the kind of person that we were meant to be, to be truly human, how to love God and basically love our neighbor.

Let me read to you what Martin Luther writes in his introduction to the commentary to Galatians,

"Oh Law you would climb up to the kingdom of my conscience and reign and condemn me and drive me to desperation. You have over stepped your bounds. You are a guide to the conscience but the gospel and Jesus is my righteousness and every lasting life not you. So trouble me not. I will not allow you to reign in my conscience which is the seat and temple of Jesus my sweet Saviour and Mediator. He shall keep my conscience joyful and quiet in the knowledge of my righteousness in Him"

What Martin Luther is saying is that, everyone has got a conscience and the conscience is placed in our self regard, our identity and our self esteem. You either fill your conscience with the stuff that

you've done yourself, your performance, your beauty, your intellect, or you fill it with what Jesus has done for us, what God sees in us because of what of Jesus has done. But we often forget. The default mode is to fill our conscience with our performance and the law keeps on climbing back into our conscience and pushing Jesus out. And you can see that in the way we may say we're saved by faith, but the way we act often is because the law keeps on climbing back into our conscience. For example, Matthew chapter 6, where we're talking about giving, Jesus taught by giving you either give like the hypocrites in front of the synagogue. So they will be praised by other people or you give quietly so that the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing.

On one hand, they give publicly because they have a desire for glory, which is because the law keeps coming back into the conscience and you have to perform so that other people will look upon you and praise you, or you will praise yourself. But if you actually have Jesus in the center of your conscience, you don't need that anymore. You're giving out of love and reciprocating the love that God has done for you, so you give out of that. Matthew chapter 6 verse 5 and 6, you're talking about prayer. You either pray standing in front of everybody else and pray long eloquent huge prayers. Why? Because you see prayer as merit. So therefore the law climbs back into your conscience again. And you're trying to fulfill your conscience by your law, by your self performance. Or are you praying in the quietness of your room and lock the door and you pray to God. Why? Because the prayer is not performance. Prayer is a response to what God has done for you. When you get into the room and you pray, you are praying because of what has God has done for you.

See Matthew chapter 5,

Matthew 5:20 (ESV) For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

If our righteousness is performance based just like the Pharisees and scribes, we will never enter the kingdom of God because that kind of righteousness is only to the letter of the law and not the spirit of the law. That kind of righteousness is so heavy that you will never be able to sustain the burden.

Gray based obedience is unconditional. It is based on what Jesus has done for us, and we are basically simply responding. Grace based obedience is real. It is inward, it comes from the spirit of God. So I'm going to pray that through this Gamma lesson, that we would truly reflect when we obey, is it because the law is climbing back in the conscience again or are we responding out of the response to grace and love.

Let us pray.

Lord, we thank you for your word and ask that you hide this word in our hearts as we discuss it in our groups. We ask for Jesus's sake.