



“God’s Word and Your Heart: Part 2”

Matthew 5:31-48

Big Idea: God desires that the motive of our hearts be aligned with His heart.

WAYS that God desires our hearts to be aligned with His heart:

God desires that we desire His design for marriage over the world’s design for marriage (31-32).

Jesus continued His emphasis on the truth that the motive of the heart was what matters most to God. He turned to an issue that was no less sensitive then as it is today, which was the issue of divorce. In terms that are short, concise, and clear, Jesus stated that God’s design and desire for marriage was that the relationship that is established through marriage is a relationship that lasts for a lifetime. Although Jesus did allow for an exception for divorce in the case of adultery, Jesus did not command or imply a desire that divorce would be the outcome even in the case of adultery. The overall emphasis was that marriage was permanent in God’s eyes and that divorce exists not because of God’s design, but because of man’s sinful desires. The heart of what Jesus was doing in these verses was to point His disciples to the heart of God over-and-above the rules of man. From the Old Testament to the New Testament, God used marriage as an illustration of His relationship with His people, and what we see from Hosea to Revelation -- and in other passages -- is that while God’s people may be unfaithful to Him, He remains faithful to them. God refuses to “divorce” His people, and in imitating Him, we are called to have a heart for marriage that follows His heart for marriage.

1. Read Gen. 2:24 and Mt. 19:6. What do these verses teach us about the heart of God when it comes to marriage?
2. Read Mt. 19:8. What does this verse say about the origin of divorce?
3. Why are these verses so hard and stir-up so many different and difficult feelings?
4. When we think about our sin being equal to committing adultery against God and when we consider God’s unwillingness to divorce us, how should that impact our perspective of marriage?

God desires that we model the way that He simply does what He says He’s going to do (33-37).

Jesus moves from actions, like adultery and divorce, to the words that we speak. The problem with oaths that are taken against the heavens, earth, and even our own heads, imply that the oath taker has some authority and power over the things that are used to make promises against. The problem with that is three-fold. First, the heavens, the earth, and even our own heads all belong to God! Making oaths against things that we don’t have authority, power, or ownership over is simply ridiculous, but it’s also “evil.” It’s evil for the second reason, which is that making oaths against the things that God has power, authority, and ownership over discounts His sovereignty and authority and also puts His name at risk. The final problem is that oaths like these move away from imitating God. God simply does what He says He’s going to

do. Therefore, Jesus said a simple “yes” and “no” was sufficient. If a follower’s actions line-up with their words, there’s nothing else that’s needed.

1. How do these verses impact the way that you think about the promises you make and the oaths you take? Why?
2. Why do we sometimes feel like we need to say *more* than just “yes” or “no?”
3. How do your actions line-up with your words? Discuss how our actions and words impact our witness for Jesus.

God desires that we display His grace to those who need His grace (38-42).

God’s law in Exodus 21 was for the protection of God’s people, working to restrain sin and to restrain retribution, making the penalty for a crime equal to the crime. However, sinful humanity had taken something that was a law to help restrain sin and turned it into a license for personal retribution and vengeance. Just as with oaths, those who take justice into their own hands and pursue vengeance on their own behalf, fail to trust in God’s sovereignty to bring justice to His people and to take vengeance on behalf of his people. In other words, people were acting on God’s behalf, failing to live in faith on God’s promises to protect and to bring justice. However, the words of Jesus also point to more than just not taking retribution into our own hands. Jesus actually commands that His followers put the interests of others before their own interests. He commands that His followers display mercy and grace to the those who don’t deserve mercy and grace. He demands that His followers have hearts that beat with the heart of God for others, even those who are evil! Again, Jesus is calling for His followers to imitate the heart of their Father, and He isn’t asking us to do anything that He didn’t do Himself for us when we were still sinners!

1. Read Mt. 5:39. Is there someone in your life that you need to apply this verse to in your actions towards them? Discuss how you can turn the other cheek.
2. Read Mt. 5:40-42. Is there someone in your life that you need to apply these verses to in your actions towards them? Discuss how you can display God’s grace and mercy to them.
3. Break-up into groups of two or three, and spend time praying for one another for the strength and wisdom to display God’s grace to those who need His grace.

God desires that we love those He loves and that we pray for those who need His love (43-48).

In Mt. 5:43, Jesus first quoted from Lev. 19:18: “You shall love your neighbor.” Then He went on to quote from man: “...and hate your enemy.” Moving to the heart of God, Jesus told the disciples that they were not to “hate” their enemies, but rather they were to “love” their enemies! In fact, His disciples were called to “pray for those who persecute you” (Mt. 5:44). Jesus explained to His disciples that God daily shows His love for all in the general grace that gives to all in creation. From the sun that shines to the rain that falls, growing crops and producing food and giving warmth, God’s grace was poured out daily both “on the just and on the unjust” (Mt. 5:45). Jesus also made the obvious point that even enemies of God love those who love them, so the disciples call was to imitate God in loving those He loves and in praying for those who need His love! How? The key is what the disciples had and would have in the theirs from this moment forward, which was the presence and power of Jesus!

1. In what ways have you been persecuted for your faith? What was your initial response to that persecution? How did your response line-up with these verses?
2. Who is an enemy whom you need to love in obedience to Christ? Pray for hate to be removed and for love to take its place in your heart. How can you show them love this week?
3. Make a list of ways to pray, and then pray for your enemies and those who persecute you.