

A Study Of The Book of Matthew

“The Application of the Word”

Matthew 5:21-48

Now Jesus introduces six great examples of how the righteousness that He describes in verse twenty is the continuation and fulfillment of the Old Testament Law. Jesus introduces each of these great examples with some variation of the statement, “**You have it heard it said but I say to you....**” (vv. 21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43)

Some commentators hold that in these statements Jesus is setting Himself against the Law of Moses, making His statements mean something akin to “**You know what the Old Testament taught but I teach something different.**” They believe the phrase, “**You have heard**” refers to the Old Testament teachings and the phrase “**But I say**” introduces a “**new**” teaching of the Lord which supersedes the old. Such is not the case. “**You have heard**” introduces the erroneous or incomplete teaching of Scribes (the Oral traditions), while “**But I say**” is followed by the teaching of the

Lord but is also the true teaching of the Old Testament. So what Jesus is doing is not contradicting the Law or setting in place a new set of laws but correcting the people's understanding of God's original intent! The knowledge of God's word by the people that Jesus spoke to was limited to only what the Scribe and Pharisees told them. They did not and could not read it for themselves. We certainly do not have that excuse today.

As we examine each of the issues that Jesus raises we have to recognize that each of them could in and of itself be a sermon. But today I have chosen rather to deal with them together. Let me say at the outset that you may feel conviction because of your own failure in one of these areas. You may be guilty as charged. But you also need to understand that God is bigger than your sin. If you are willing to bring your sin to Jesus, He is willing to forgive you.

First, The Issue of Anger. (5:21-26)

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' (22) But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And

whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire."

*According to what the Scribes and Pharisees taught one could keep the sixth commandment as long as they did not actually commit Murder. But Jesus warns that holding bitter resentment in your heart towards another is also a sin. We have all heard the statement, **"If looks could kill, they would be dead."** We mean that the burning anger is seen in someone's face. Both long held resentment and explosive anger are sins. It would be ridiculous though to make the jump in logic then, that anger was just as bad as murder. The person who shouts in anger has sinned but not to the degree that someone who allows that anger to move them to kill someone.*

*To hold bitter resentment toward another is to place ourselves in a dangerous position. The term **"Raca"** is a reflection on someone's intelligence and is the equivalent in our day of calling someone an **"idiot," "stupid," "lame-brain," "blockhead,"** well I think you get the point. Even more dangerous Jesus says is to question a man's moral character which is what is implied in calling someone a **"fool."***

Jesus then makes two practical applications:

- In the area of Worship. (vv. 23-24)

“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, (24) leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

If anger is a sin and it certainly can be, and sin affect's our relationship with God, then we cannot worship and harbor anger in our heart. The principle is simple, if you are harboring anger or a grudge against someone, attendance in a worship service is an exercise in hypocritical futility.

- In the area of Civil Law. (vv. 25-26)

“Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. (26) Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.”

The point that Jesus is making here is the wisdom of settling issues quickly. Rather than waiting on the law to settle a dispute we should do everything we can to settle the issue out of court. I think you understand that even in our day when an issue goes to court, often both sides lose. The

Apostle Paul warns “as much as it lays within you live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18).

Second, The Issue of Faithfulness (5:27-30)

"You have heard that it was said to those old,' You shall not commit adultery.' (28) But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (29) If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. (30) And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell."

*Jesus now turns His attention to the seventh commandment, “**Do not commit adultery.**” Jesus now communicates a radical new standard of sexual purity. Jesus says adultery begins in the heart; sexual sins are always preceded by sexual fantasies. But Jesus is not saying that the act of adultery and adultery in the heart are the same thing. Some have even justified their act of adultery by saying, “**I’ve already committed adultery in my heart, so I might as well carry through with the***

*physical act.” **That is absurd!** The act of adultery is far worse than adultery in the heart. The point that Jesus is making is that they are both sins. Both need to be confessed, forsaken and forgiven*

*When Jesus says, “**If your right eye causes you to sin pluck it out**” (v.29) I believe He is using a figure of speech and does not mean this literally. I do believe that Jesus is saying is, “**Sin is serious business and it demands a radical response!**” Sin should not be justified or excused but recognized, repented of, and the causes of that sin avoided.*

*I like the way John Stott puts it, “**What does this involve in practice? Let me elaborate and so interpret Jesus’ teaching: ‘If you eyes causes you to sin because temptation comes to you through your eyes (objects that you see), then pluck out your eyes. That is, don’t look! Behave as if you had actually plucked out your eyes and flung them away, and were now blind and so could not see the objects which previously caused you to sin. Again, if your hand or foot causes you to sin, because temptation comes to you through your hands (things that you do) or your feet (places you visit), then cut them off. That is: don’t do it! Don’t go! Behave as if you had actually cut off your hands***

and feet, and had flung them away, and were now crippled and so could not do the things or visit the places which previously had caused you to sin.'

That is the meaning of mortification.” [John Stott.

“Essential Living: The Sermon the Mount.” (Downer’s Grove, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 1978) p. 89]

Third, The Issue of Divorce. (5:31-32)

"Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'

(32) But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”

Perhaps everyone in this congregation has been touched by divorce in some way. When well over half the marriages in our country end in divorce it eventually affects virtually everyone. The Church of today is often guilty of approaching divorce in the same way as the Scribes and Pharisees did. We either raise the standard or lower it. Some today in trying to stem the tide of divorce, say there should be no divorce for any reason and no remarriage for anyone at anytime. It sounds nice and neat, but is in reality unbiblical and impractical. The opposite of course is the

tendency to lower the standard to accommodate everyone.

The situation in Jesus' day was that some felt that a **“man”** could divorce his wife for virtually any reason (even burning his breakfast) and others held that one could divorce only on the grounds of unfaithfulness.

But when you cut through the semantics they all assumed that divorce was a biblical option. They only argued over the grounds for divorce. But their interest was purely procedural.

We have recognize that Jesus only touches on divorce here this is not His full revelation on divorce, Jesus covers it more fully in Matthew 19 where the religious leaders try to trap Jesus over this very issue. Here Jesus is just pointing out another area that the Scribes have moved away from what the word of God really says.

Perhaps the most difficult verse for us today is verse thirty-two when it states, **“...whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”** Some churches today take this passage completely literally (Churches of Christ for example) and demand that remarried partners

break up their current marriages and return to their original partners. But in practice this only creates two new divorces. I think it fair to say that God holds one accountable the marriage they are currently in.

Fourth, The Issue of Truthfulness. (5:33-37)
"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' (34) But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; (35) nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. (36) Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. (37) But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one."

The Old Testament has much to say about the taking of oaths: "...You shall not swear by My name falsely..." (Leviticus 19:12). "If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word..." (Numbers 30:2). "When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it..." (Deuteronomy 23:21).

God had not forbidden the taking of an oath, but had cautioned the one who makes a vow to keep his word.

There were two abuses of the oath in the days of our Lord. One might be called **frivolous swearing**. Men use oaths (or profanity) in order to give emphasis to their words—words of no real consequence. This is the kind of oath-taking forbidden by the Old Testament commandment, “*You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain ...*” (Exodus 20:7). Technically speaking, profanity is the common or indiscriminate use of God’s name. And this God has forbidden.

The second abuse of an oath was more deliberate and malicious. It was the use of **evasive swearing**. In The Third Commandment God had said, “*You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.*” (Exodus 20:7). They shifted the emphasis to: “*You shall not take **the name** of the Lord your God in vain.*” There is a substantial difference. Thereby an oath was not so much a matter of keeping your word, but of phrasing your vow in such a way that you did not have to keep your word. Any vow which included the name of God was considered a solemn oath which must be kept. But any vow which carefully avoided the

name of God was not technically binding. One could thus swear by heaven, or Jerusalem, or the temple, or even cross my heart and hope to die, and not feel bound to his oath. The effect was that people would be deceived in taking a man at his word (or vow), but the man himself felt no obligation to live by his word.

Matthew later records that Jesus speaks decisively against this very problem (Matthew 23:16-22) where He reminds us that God is a part of every oath anyway; if you swear by “**heaven, earth, Jerusalem**” or even “**your head,**” you swear by God – and your oath must be honored. Our Lord’s interpretation of the Old Testament revelation restored proper emphasis in this matter. When you give your word, keep it. Having to swear or make oaths betrays the weakness of our word. Say what you mean, and mean what you say. If one has to take an oath that they are telling the truth, they are probably not believable anyway.

Fifth, The Issue of Revenge. (5:38-42)

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' (39) But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. (40) If

anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. (41) And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. (42) Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.”

Perhaps you have heard the story of the weary truck driver who pulled his rig into an all-night truck stop. He was tired and hungry. The waitress had just served him when three tough looking, leather jacketed motorcyclist - of the Hell's Angels type - decided to give him a hard time. Not only did they verbally abuse him, one grabbed the hamburger off his plate, another took a handful of his French-fries, and the third picked up his coffee and began to drink it.

*How did this trucker respond? How would you respond? Well, this trucker did not respond as one might expect. Instead, he calmly rose, picked up his check, walked to the front of the room, put the check and his money on the cash register, and went out the door. As the waitress put the money in the cash register she stood watching out the door as the big truck drove away into the night. When she returned, one of the cyclists said to her, "**Well, he's not much of a man, is he?**" She replied, "**I don't know what kind of a man he is, but he***

sure isn't much of a truck driver. He just ran over three motorcycles on his way out of the parking lot."

On some level we all like that because we all feel the human desire to get even. We have all heard the old saying, "Don't get mad, get even!"

Perhaps the most quoted and a misquoted verse from the Old Testament is: "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" (Exodus 21:24). In reality this verse was directed to the judges of Israel and applied to administration of civil justice not personal revenge. It assured that justice was fair and the people received no more or no less than they deserved. What happened was the principle was perverted to be a biblical support for retaliation and revenge.

Jesus gives us a very radical the four-fold solution to a heart of retaliation.

- *Turn the other cheek. (v.39)*

What is described here is an insulting slap which is not an attempt to do bodily harm but a deliberate effort to insult and perhaps provoke retaliation. It is wrong to think that Jesus means a physical attack cannot be resisted or defended against. That does not mean that if someone

attacks and hits you on the right side of your head with a baseball bat you are to allow them to hit you on the left side. He is talking about dealing with an insult not physical violence.

- *Give more than is Required (v. 40)*
- *Go the extra Mile. (v. 41)*

At the time Jesus said this, Judea was under Roman military occupation and any Roman soldier might command a Jew to carry his pack for a mile, but only a mile. Jesus says go the extra mile and transform what was an attempt to manipulate into a free act of service.

- *Show Mercy to the Less Fortunate (v. 42)*

One final word, there is a great deal of difference between standing for our rights and standing up for what is right. We may and should, be willing to suffer innocently for the cause of Christ, but we have the responsibility as Christian citizens to stand up for law and order and justice.

Sixth, The Issue of Who Is My Neighbor? (5:43-48)

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' (44) But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for

those who spitefully use you and persecute you, (45) that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (46) For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? (47) And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? (48) Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

*The Scribes and Pharisees had taken the command to love their neighbor and added an opposite – an equal obligation to hate your enemy. Although that fit neatly with the common sense feeling of the day – **it was not what God said.***

Jesus says that the Christian is to live by a higher standard – that they are love their enemies. (v. 44) You are to pray for those who persecute you (v. 44b). Praying for your enemy has the potential to do two things, it may change your circumstances, and it will change you. The more in engage in this kind of behavior the more we look like our Heavenly Father (v. 45)

Conclusion

*“It was the day after Christmas and Mr. Greene parked his car to pick up the morning paper. He noticed a dirty, poorly dressed boy looking at his car. Seeing the boy eyeing the car, he reminded himself to be quick or he might be missing a hubcap when he returned. He came out of the store with his paper under his arm and just as he opened the door to the car, the boy asked **“Mister, how much would a new car like that cost?”** Mr. Greene responded, **“I really don't know; my brother gave me this car as a gift.”** The ragged little boy looked unbelievably at the car with a look of wonder in his eyes, and said something unexpected. He didn't say what you might think, **“Gee, I wish I had a brother like that.”** He said, **“Gee, I wish I could be a brother like that.”** [J. David Hoke. *“Love That is Tough.”**

Matthew 5:43-48. Sermon on the Mount Series. www.jdavidhoke.com]

“The Application of the Word”

Matthew 5:21-48

First, The Issue of Anger. (5:21-26)

Two practical applications

- *In the area of worship. (vv. 23-24)*
- *In the area of Civil Law. (vv. 25-26)*

Second, The Issue of Faithfulness. (5:27-30)

Third, The Issue of Divorce. (5:31-32)

Fourth, The Issue of Truthfulness. (5:33-37)

(Lev.19:12, Num. 30:2, Deut. 23:21) God had not forbidden the taking of an oath, but had cautioned the one who makes a vow to keep his word.

There were two abuses of the oath,

- *frivolous swearing. (Exodus 20:7)*
- *evasive swearing.*

Fifth, The Issue of Revenge. (5:38-42)

Jesus gives us a very radical the four-fold solution to a heart of retaliation.

- *Turn the other cheek. (v. 39)*
- *Give more than is required. (v. 40)*
- *Go the extra mile. (v. 41)*
- *Show Mercy to the Less fortunate. (v. 42)*

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“The Application of the Word”

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First, The Issue of _____ (5:21-26)

Two practical applications

- *In the area of _____ (vv. 23-24)*
- *In the area of _____ [Law (vv. 25-26)]*

Second, The Issue of _____ . (5:27-30)

Third, The Issue of _____ . (5:31-32)

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