

## Revealing Real Righteousness

### Matthew 5:27-32

#### Adultery, Divorce, Oaths

#### Big idea - Faithfulness

In our study last week, we took some time to consider Matthew 5:21-26, as Jesus began to challenge the most prominent teachings and teachers of the day by presenting to His followers a better interpretation of the law, one that dealt with their inner attitudes and not just their outward activities.

In response to the law against murder we saw that even anger might be in violation of God's law against murder and that...

Real Righteousness:

1. Restrains an Angry Heart
2. Reconciles with an Angry Brother
3. Runs toward Resolution

As we continue our study this morning, we'll see Jesus continue to challenge, correct, and confront His followers with real righteousness as it relates to faithfulness in marriage and in word.

NOTE: As we approach the subject of marriage and divorce we ought to bear in mind that this is not everything spoken on the subject in the Bible. The OT speaks of divorce in several other places, and both Jesus and the Apostle Paul addresses the issue directly elsewhere, but even with some direct teaching it is a subject that appears open to some nuance.

- That is to say that as we attempt to examine what's in front of us this morning, utilizing some other portions of the Bible for cross reference, it is not an exhaustive message on the subject and it is worthy of deeper examination.

#### 1. Real righteousness is faithful in marriage.

a) Guard the affections of your heart - from lust.

**READ: 5:27-30**

NOTE: Again, Jesus doesn't challenge what they had heard because it was wrong, but because what they understood about the law was incomplete. The teaching of the day caused the people to focus only on their outward activities while disregarding their inward affections. So once again Jesus applies the law beyond the physical act of adultery to the lust of a persons heart.

- Adultery is when a married person engages in sexual activity with a person who is not their spouse. While the Bible does condemn sexual sin more broadly in other places like Matthew 19, adultery is what this law addresses specifically.

NOTE: An interesting point is that in addressing the inward attitude of adultery, Jesus aims His correction toward men. Certainly, a married or betrothed woman could also be guilty of adultery, but in the religious climate of that day it was more likely for a woman to be held to account for the act of adultery than the man.

EXAMPLE: John 8 – The scribes and Pharisee's bring a woman to Jesus who was caught in the very act of adultery. One question often posed is, where is the man? He was just a guilty according to the law as this woman.

*John 8:1-12*

*2 Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. 3 Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, 4 they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. 5 Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" 6 This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear.*

*7 So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." 8 And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9 Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. 10 When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"*

*11 She said, "No one, Lord."*

*And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."*

*12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."*

NOTE: This encounter highlights the stark contrast of approach between the self-righteous teaching of the Pharisees and the gracious ministry of Jesus. Jesus doesn't question the guilt of the woman, but instead He responds in such a way that everybody gathered in condemnation against her are then convicted within their own hearts. After the accusers leave, the woman also leaves free from condemnation while still encouraged toward repentance – to turn from her sin to follow Jesus.

- Just what brought conviction to the accusers is unclear, but the application of Jesus here reveals that while the law condemns both act of adultery and the lustful affections of the heart, Jesus shows correction and grace to those who come to Him.

APPLICATION: When it comes to maintaining the sanctity of our marriage and remaining faithful to it, we must guard the affections of our heart from the lustful longings of other people. Sex is a beautiful and blessed thing, but it is something that is regularly perverted by society and in our minds. It is something that our enemy encourages outside of God's design and discourages within it!

- Some people have confused Jesus' point thinking that if they sinned inwardly, they might as well do it. Jesus is not saying that the act of adultery and the lust of the heart are the same thing, or yield the same consequences, but rather that the command against the act of adultery also condemns inward attitude of lust.

NOTE: The approach of Jesus also brings the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment into view as the same Greek word used here for lust is used in the Greek translation of the OT – the Septuagint as covet. It means to have an affectionate longing for something that belongs to someone else, and in Exodus 20:17 the longing for your neighbor's wife is clearly prohibited.

- Following up this interpretation Jesus presents a rather strange and shocking application...

### READ: 5:29-30

NOTE: It is confusing that just after directing His followers away from the acts of the body toward the issues of the heart that He would then tell them to deal with sin by mutilating the body. Does Jesus really want us to remove the body parts that cause us to stumble into sin.

- This serves as a good example of where we need to be careful in our literal approach to the interpretation of scripture. A hyper literal interpretation would leave the disciples of Jesus physically maimed, but because we don't see any of them taking Jesus literally, I think we can determine with confidence that they understood this to be a figure of speech meant to offer some shock value to the seriousness of sin and the drastic measures that we should take to pursue and maintain purity.

NOTE: The problem with a literal interpretation is that the cutting away of the flesh doesn't go far enough. A blind person still has their mind, and a person whose hands have been cut off may still possess a sin filled heart. What we really need is someone to change our heart, to cut away the flesh from it!

- In Romans 2, Paul argues a different but applicable point. Here Paul is arguing against the value of physical circumcision.

### *Rom 2:28-29*

*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; 29 but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.*

APPLICATION: The point is this, don't put up with things that trip you up and ensnare your heart in sin. Cutting things out may not include plucking out your eye, but it may involve removing those things from before your eyes. It may involve the removal of a mobile device, leaving behind certain forms of entertainment, or cutting out an old or developing relationship.

NOTE: Don't allow the temporary pleasure of sin bring you into the eternal torment of hell!

b) Guard the condition of your heart - from hardness

**READ 5:31-3**

- Though I prefer not to get ahead of ourselves, it's important for us to see how Jesus addressed this issue later in His ministry to better grasp what He says here.

*Matt 19:3-9*

*3 The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?"*

- This reveals the prevailing teaching and attitude of the day, a teaching that came from a poor interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1 that says:

*"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce...*

NOTE: While there were some rabbis who took this to speak of sexual immorality, others interpreted it more liberally meaning that husbands were demanding divorce in any case where their wife was displeasing to them. Because of this interpretation, the Jews were taking marriage much more causally than God intended and divorce had become commonplace.

NOTE: The Pharisees themselves utilized this in order to pursue divorce and marry someone more pleasing. They attempted to escape the commitment of marriage by utilizing an interpretive legal loophole.

*4 And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' 5 and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? 6 So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."*

- While this teaching stands in opposition to the current philosophies of the world, Jesus is clear and concise in his answer. Marriage is meant to be a joining together of a man and a woman as one flesh for their lifetime.

APPLICATION: While the definition of marriage is under attack, we should also recognize that there may be marriages within our congregation that are under attack. Let us remember what the Lord teaches here, and remember to keep the marriages of this body in prayer.

*7 They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?"*

*8 He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."*

- Another issue is that while the people were being taught that divorce was commanded Jesus explains that divorce is permissible, not commanded nor even desirable. It is allowed due to the hardness of the human heart.

APPLICATION: Marriage can be really difficult, and the danger in difficulty is to grow hardened and distant to the point where divorce becomes desirable rather than permissible.

- If your heart has grown hardened toward your spouse, my encouragement to you, and my prayer for you is that God would soften your heart again. That He would apply the water of His word, and the oil of His Spirit like a potter would with clay.
- If you are not in that place, don't be so foolish to think that it cannot happen to you. Be vigilant, repent often, say you're sorry, don't let the sun go down on your wrath, pursue reconciliation, and run toward resolution always. Guard your heart from hardening.
- Jesus expands on His previous teaching to include sexual immorality more broadly. The Greek word used here is *porneia*, and it is often translated as fornication. It's a word that includes various types of sexual sin. *Porneia* can be described as when a person focusses their sexual energy toward anyone who is not their spouse.

NOTE: It can be far easier to write a marriage off than it is to remain faithful in marriage through difficult times but according to God, marriage matters!

## 2. Be faithful in word

READ: 33-37

- The law mentioned here is a variation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> commandment, not to take the name of the Lord in vain. Leviticus 19:12 and Deuteronomy 23:21 extend this to the swearing of oaths in the Lord's name.

NOTE: What was happening at this time is that rather than swearing an oath by the name of God, they would swear by everything else with the thinking that that they would then have the freedom to break their vow, as it wasn't sworn in God's name.

### a) *Give up - Be wary of oaths*

- Making an oath before God is a serious matter, and one that should be taken with all sobriety, and this isn't the point that Jesus is challenging. Instead, what Jesus is challenging is the tendency of the Pharisee's to swear oaths by lesser things to give them the freedom to break the oath at a later time and still in their mind uphold the law.

NOTE: Another point is that swearing an oath by your own head reveals the weakness of such swearing as we cannot even change the color of our hair!

### b) *Get real - Be worthy of trust*

- Of all people, the followers of Christ ought to be the most trustworthy and reliable but sadly this is often not the case.

NOTE: There may be times when for unforeseen reasons you are unable to do the things that you said you would do. Accident's, sickness, or even forgetfulness plague us all. When those

things do happen, do people say something like, “I wonder where they are, that’s very uncharacteristic of them.” Or do they say something more along the lines of, “I am not surprised, they aren’t the most reliable person.”

- Is your life sufficient to back up your words, or do you need to make promises, swear on things, or give payments of assurance? We ought to be people who say what we mean, people who mean what they say, and people who strive to keep their word even to our own hurt!

*Ps 15:1*

*Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle?*

*Who may dwell in Your holy hill?*

*Ps 15:4*

*He who swears to his own hurt and does not change;*

- There was a time when a handshake was just as valuable as a contract, when a man’s word was something that could be trusted and banked upon. While we are living in a different time, the standard for us as the followers of Christ remains the same.

APPLICATION: Certainly, the application could be made for our marriage vows, but Jesus applies this principle to every component of our lives. In the home, in your work, in your relationships with your spouse, children, friends, and church, in your service to Him, and in your commitments to others. God’s desire for us is that we are faithful and trustworthy, that we are like Him.