

Jesus and the Law, Part 2

Matthew 5:31-48

July 30th, 2017

1. Jesus came to **fulfill** the law not **abolish** it. (5:17-19)
 - a. What God commanded as moral law, Jesus perfectly obeyed.
 - b. What God foreshadowed in the ceremonial and sacrificial systems, Jesus embodied.
 - c. What God required in justice, Jesus will enact in the kingdom.
2. The righteousness of the Pharisees was **inadequate**. (5:20, 48)
 - a. God requires not just external compliance to the letter of the law but internal conformity to the spirit of the law.
 - b. They were content with the appearance of righteousness.
 - c. Not just murder but anger (5:21-26)
 - d. Not just adultery but lust (5:27-30)
 - e. We will see in the four specific examples today that the Pharisees twisted each of the original commands into an excuse to do harm. The problem there is not with God's law, the problem is with man's sin.
 - i. We see this today when people rightly are repulsed by some abuse scandal in the church, or a pastor who uses his position of power to take advantage of people, or a Christian business man who is known to be a crook. Or people struggle as they consider incidents in church history where people in the name of Christianity do atrocious things.
 - ii. "Religion is not the virus. Sin is. As a result, religion becomes a tool for human sinfulness."
(David A. Robertson)
 - iii. Several hotbutton issues today – divorce, vengeance or pacifism. Each could warrant their own series but don't miss out on the forest by focusing on the trees.
3. They turned divorce regulations designed to **protect** women into a justification to **harm** women. (5:31-32)
 - a. Quotes from Deuteronomy 24, a regulation that Jesus says in Matthew 19 was only permitted because of their hardness of hearts.
 - i. **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**
 1. When does the command come in? V. 1-3 are giving a description of a scenario – it's not saying he should divorce her or send her out – then in v. 4 it says if he does these things, he is not allowed to take her back as his wife.
 - ii. Even then it was designed not to facilitate easy divorce but to protect a woman whose husband divorces her so that she can certify that she is free to remarry. That would have been her main means of provision for herself and any children.
 - b. Different perspectives in rabbinical thought at the time –
 - i. School of Shammai says "a man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity in her"
 - ii. Hillel says he may divorce her even if she spoiled a dish
 - iii. Akiba says he may divorce her if he found another fairer than she

c. **Matthew 19:3-9**

- i. Appeals to Genesis and the creation of man and woman and their joining as one flesh
- ii. "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."
- iii. Permitted by Moses because of their hardness of heart, not this way from the beginning
- iv. Again includes the exception of immorality
- v. Disciples response in v 10 shows that this was somewhat shocking – It's better not to marry then!

d. 1 Corinthians 7 adds the exception of an unbelieving spouse who leaves the believer

- i. **1 Corinthians 7:15** ¹⁵ Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such *cases*, but God has called us to peace.

e. Divorce and remarriage

- i. If the divorce is legitimate, the remarriage would be as well.
- ii. If the divorce is illegitimate, the remarriage would be as well.

f. Jesus taught us to honor the one-flesh covenant of marriage (cf. Matthew 19:3-9)

- i. Every divorce is the result of sin but not every divorce is sinful.
- ii. Divorce is permitted, but not required, on the ground of sexual immorality and abandonment.
- iii. When the divorce was not permissible, any subsequent remarriage (to someone other than the original spouse) results in adultery.
- iv. In situations where the divorce was permissible, remarriage is also permissible.
- v. Improperly divorced and remarried Christians should stay as they are, but repent and be forgiven of their past sins and make whatever amends are necessary.

4. They misused oaths to justify deceit. (5:33-37)

a. Series of OT quotes compiled together

- i. **Numbers 30:2** "If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.
- ii. Leviticus 19:12; Deuteronomy 23:21-23

b. The intent of the oath was to value truth and emphasize the truthfulness of the statement or commitment.

c. The Pharisees had turned it in to an elaborate system to avoid telling the truth

- i. **Matthew 23:16-22** "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, *that* is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.' ¹⁷ "You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? ¹⁸ "And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, *that* is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.' ¹⁹ "You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? ²⁰ "Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears *both* by the altar and by everything on it. ²¹ "And whoever swears by the temple, swears *both* by the temple and by Him

who dwells within it. ²² "And whoever swears by heaven, swears *both* by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.

1. Like the child who makes a promise but crosses her fingers behind her back
 - ii. D.A. Carson – judged how binding an oath really was by examining how closely it was related to YHWH’s name. Incredible distinctions proliferate under such an approach. Swearing by heaven and earth was not binding, nor was swearing *by* Jerusalem, but swearing *toward* Jerusalem was.
 - d. God Himself has sworn oaths so the point is not to never swear an oath but that we are to be truthful
 - i. **Luke 1:72-73** ⁷² To show mercy toward our fathers, And to remember His holy covenant, ⁷³ The oath which He swore to Abraham our father,
 - ii. **Acts 2:29-30** "Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. ³⁰ But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne.
 - e. Likewise Paul swore oaths
 - i. **Romans 1:9** ⁹ For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the* gospel of His Son, is my witness *as to* how unceasingly I make mention of you,
 - f. Jesus taught us to be **truthful** without elaborate oath-taking.
 - i. Oaths are a poor substitute for integrity.
5. They misused “an eye for an eye” to justify personal **vengeance**. (5:38-42)
- a. **Leviticus 24:19-20** 'If a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so it shall be done to him: ²⁰ fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him.
 - i. Provided the nation with a judicial formula for punishment and protected against excessive punishment or personal vengeance. Limited the punishment so that you don’t have what we see so often in the history of the world where there are rounds of escalating violence – stabbed me so I cut off your hand so you murder me so my family kills your family so now our clans are at war...
 - ii. **Leviticus 19:18** ¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.
 - b. Scenarios
 - i. Insult to personal dignity –
 1. Right cheek specified, right handed person would strike someone on the right cheek if using the back of the hand
 2. **1 Peter 2:23** and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously;
 3. **Romans 12:17** Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.
 4. **Romans 13:2-4** ² Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. ³ For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no

fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; ⁴ for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

- ii. Court of law
 - iii. Forced to go one mile
 - 1. Refers to the Roman system of commandeering civilians to carry soldier's gear for one mile.
 - iv. Give to the one with need
 - 1. Even if they are insulting you.
 - c. Each of these scenarios is a stark contrast to personal vengeance for a perceived wrong
 - d. Jesus taught us to **sacrifice** even for those who want to harm us.
 - i. Rather than "she doesn't deserve my kindness after what she did to me"
6. They twisted a command to love into a justification for **hatred**. (5:43-47)
- a. The command comes from the Bible, the addition came from their hearts.
 - i. **Leviticus 19:18** 'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.
 - ii. **Proverbs 25:21** If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink;
 - b. The contrast is love for enemies, even those who persecute.
 - i. Kindness not affection
 - c. To do so is to reflect God's kindness to all
 - i. Carson – To be persecuted because of righteousness is to align oneself with the prophets (5:12); but to bless and pray for those who persecute us is to align oneself with the character of God.
 - ii. Analogy – what do you want to do when you grow up?
 - 1. Jesus' audience wouldn't really understand the question – they would do what their parents did. If farmer, then they would farm. Blacksmith, then they would be a blacksmith.
 - 2. When we show kindness to someone who "doesn't deserve it" then we are acting like our Father.
 - iii. Common grace
 - d. Anyone can show kindness to those who are kind
 - i. Tax collectors used as a stand in for the worst of society because they preyed upon their fellow Jewish people, collected extra taxes to line their own pockets, and were considered traitors.
 - e. Jesus taught us to **love** even our enemies.
7. Key ideas
- a. God's law requires our righteousness to be like **His**.

- i. Jesus circles around again to the high bar of holiness God requires.
 1. Greater than the Pharisees and their focus on external righteousness and tendency to twist the law to find loopholes.
 2. The very righteousness that characterizes God the Father.
- ii. Two responses
 1. Recognize that my righteousness and yours is not like this.
 - a. Odonnell - Allow the holy heaviness of the law to make us wholly humble before God.
 - b. **Galatians 3:24-25** Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.
 - c. Matthew 5:3 – Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God
 2. Desire righteousness in your innermost being
 - a. **Matthew 5:6** Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
 - b. **Matthew 5:8** Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
- b. Only Jesus can fulfill all righteousness in our place. (Matthew 5:17; Matthew 3:15)
 - i. If you respond to reading this passage by simply redoubling your efforts at personal righteousness, you'll either be frustrated or prideful.
 - ii. Dever – He is giving us a picture of exactly what he would do over the next several years.
 - iii. We can only do the things described by Jesus today when God converts us and enables us.