

What matters is still a matter of the heart



What matters in life – Sermon on the Mount - Session 3^{i 1}

CITY BIBLE FORUM

To explore how being a follower of Jesus is a matter of the heart, here touching on lust, the making of promises, and seeking revenge (from Matthew 5:27-40)

Matthew 5:27-40 ²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

³¹ “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’

³² But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

³³ “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’ ³⁴ But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. ³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. ³⁷ Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

³⁸ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’^l

³⁹ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

⁴⁰ And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

From last week

The Pharisees, part of the religious leadership of Jesus’ day, were extremely zealous in their devotion to God. Basically they adhered to the laws in the Old Testament of the Bible, but managed to add a few others, meaning they had 613 laws in total.

Matthew 5:20 “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

¹ Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version, NIV, Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society.

Matthew. 23:25-26 ²⁵“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶ Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.”

Jesus isn't saying that you have to keep 614 laws, rather than 613, if you want to have a righteousness that's greater than the Pharisees. What he is saying is that following God, being a disciple, is a matter of the heart – which is where the Pharisees were failing.

Jesus then goes on to give examples of how God looks at the heart. We looked at the issue of anger last session. This session we will look at a few other case studies.

Adultery

Matthew 5:27-28 ²⁷“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Definitions of adultery and lust

Adultery *voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and a person who is not their spouse*

Lust *to have a strong sexual desire for someone or something*

Number 7 of the 10 commandments (given to Moses 1300 years before Jesus' time) was “Do not commit adultery”. This is because the pattern set up in Genesis 2 was that sex should be reserved for marriage (a life-long committed relationship). Adultery is an act of unfaithfulness.

Q1. According to Jesus, why is lust an issue?

When you think about it, what lust starts, adultery ends. Jesus is on about the heart – if he only cared about the action (adultery) then lust wouldn't be a problem.

Q2. Generally speaking, do you think lust is the same for men and women?

Q3. Does our society think that lust is an issue?

Matthew 5:29-30 ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.



Aaron Ralston is very widely known for having survived a canyoneering accident in south-eastern Utah in 2003, during which he amputated his own right arm with a dull multi-tool in order to free himself from a dislodged boulder, which had trapped him there for five days and eight hours. After he freed himself, he had to climb down a 65 foot (around 20m) sheer cliff face to reach safety.

The incident is documented in Ralston's autobiography *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* and is the subject of the film *127 Hours*.

Q4. Do you think Jesus means to literally gouge out your eye, if you have one fantasy about a member of the opposite sex?

Jesus isn't speaking literally. He's using language of exaggeration to show how serious "sin" is.

Divorce

Matthew 5:31³¹ **"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'**

In the Old Testament, the certificate of divorce formally dissolved the marriage. Have a look on what grounds men could divorce their wives by Jesus' time:

Rabbi Hillel (Died c.10AD) – "You could divorce your wife for burning the dinner, for putting too much salt on your food, for spinning around in the street so that someone saw her knees, for taking her hair down, for speaking to men, or for saying something unkind about her mother-in-law. You could even divorce her if you found someone prettier, or for infertility or if she couldn't give you a male child" (This view was widely followed) (John MacArthur – On Divorce page 8)

Q5. What does this show about the attitudes of the Pharisees to marriage?

Matthew 5:32³² **But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.**

Q6. What is Jesus' attitude to marriage? (Note: Jesus also says other things about marriage and divorce)

Jesus has a high view of marriage. Marriage is about faithfulness and should be respected, not something that is easy to get out of.

Q7. What's our society's attitude to marriage and divorce?

You may (or may not!) find this surprising but according to the Institute of Family Studies (Working Paper 20), the biggest reason that people divorce in Australia is because they believe their partner is no longer meeting their needs for fulfillment.

Telling the truth

Criminal expert D Glenn Foster spent years examining people with a polygraph machine, or lie detector, but soon came to believe that people's bodies and voices give them away far more distinctly than any machine could. Some of the signs a person who is lying displays, Foster says, include:

- The body turning or leaning away when confronted. Rigid, uptight movements might also suddenly appear in the body.*
- The eyes begin to take on an overall worried look. Eye contact could also become more prolonged – to attempt to communicate by “an honest look” that what is being said is true.*
- Touching at the bottom part of the nose with thumb and forefinger to ease the tingling “Pinocchio Syndrome” sensation.*
- There may be a sudden intake of breath when first confronted.*
- Both eyebrows could rise, indicating shock at being caught “off balance”.*
- Mental blocks occur. There can be a sudden inability to recall things.*
- Expressions that mean the opposite of what they are intended to mean begin to be used, such as, “To tell the truth” or, “I’ll be honest with you”.*
- Normal conversational flow becomes disrupted. The guilty person may restate the question asked to stall for time.*

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Matthew 5:33-37 ³³ “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’ ³⁴ But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. ³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. ³⁷ Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

Definition of an oath

- 1. a solemn promise, often invoking a divine witness, regarding one’s future action or behaviour*
- 2. a sworn declaration, such as the promise to tell the truth, in a court of law*
- 3. a profane or offensive expression used to express anger or other strong emotions*

According to Jesus, you shouldn’t swear “As God is my witness, I am telling the truth” because you are asking the one who owns and has power over the heavens, the earth, Jerusalem, even the hairs on our head (which he can turn white or black) to act as a witness for you! In Jesus’ day, the Pharisees used to play games with oaths – certain oaths meant you didn’t need to tell the truth.

Q8. Instead of taking an oath, what according to Jesus should you do instead?

According to Jesus, what we should do is speak the truth and honor what we say.

Q9. What if you are called up as a witness and asked to take an oath in court?

It's fine, because in a court of law, we need to speak the truth, not play games.

Revenge

Definition of revenge

1. the action of hurting or harming someone in return for an injury or wrong suffered at their hands
2. the desire to repay an injury or wrong

Matthew 5:38 ³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'

In the Old Testament, the Israelites were told "an eye for an eye". It gave the victim certain rights. But what it also did was to limit retribution – the retribution needed to fit the offense.

Jesus goes on to give 4 examples of how not to fight for your rights.

Matthew 5:39 ³⁹ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Q10. Is Jesus literally saying turn your face so the person can slap you again?

No, it's more about having an attitude that is not all about fighting for your own rights.

Matthew 5:40 ⁴⁰ And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

Q11. Is Jesus literally saying you need to give all your clothes away?

No, it's more about having an attitude that is not all about fighting for your own rights.

Matthew 5:41 ⁴¹ If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

Q12. Is Jesus literally talking about going for extra long walks?

No, it's more about having an attitude that is not all about fighting for your own rights.

Matthew 5:42 ⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

Q13. Is Jesus literally saying give to every person living on the streets who asks you for money?

No, it's more about having an attitude that is not all about fighting for your own rights.

Holding lightly onto our rights is fine when the offense isn't that large. For example, if someone cuts in front of you in the traffic, then you can get over it.

Q14. What about if you have been deeply hurt or damaged by someone who was supposed to care about you and your interests?

For those of us who have been deeply hurt, forgiveness will be hard, and be hard work. Forgiveness is all about the notion that yes, a wrong has been done to me, but I'm not going to hurt that person back (forgiveness is not about pretending something didn't happen in the first place). Forgiving someone really is the only way that we can put past hurts behind us. Followers of Jesus can ask God to help them forgive someone. God understands that forgiveness is costly, because the Bible tells us that God sacrificed his own Son Jesus in order to forgive us.

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