

Matthew 5E

- Let's return to Jesus' examples illustrating what true righteousness requires
 - But first, let's not forget the big picture...
 - Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is a gigantic resetting of Israel's understanding of what it takes to enter Heaven, or the Kingdom
 - Entering the Kingdom, Jesus said, requires living a life that was even more righteous than that of the Pharisees
 - It required living according to the spirit of God's Law, not merely following the Pharisees' manmade "oral law"
 - In the second half of this chapter, Jesus has been giving us examples of what this higher standard requires
 - Last week, we learned that the spirit behind "Thou shall not murder" goes a lot deeper than not taking another person's life
 - The true intent of that law was to be loving to people!
 - And when God said thou shall not commit adultery, He didn't just mean don't fool around on your spouse
 - He meant stay faithful to your wife with your heart, mind, soul and strength...don't even let your eyes stray!
 - We still have four more examples in this chapter to study, and as we examine them, we'll continue to see how they refuted the Pharisees' teaching
 - But we've already seen how the Pharisees were perverting the Law for personal gain
 - And we've covered the Mishnah's impact on leading people astray
 - So for the final four examples, I'm going to focus mostly on the heart of each issue, rather than on the Pharisaic concern
 - And I also want us to consider if we're thinking about these issues like Pharisees too?
 - That is, are we guilty of setting aside the Word of God and ignoring God's heart on these matters

- While we pursue our own rules in place of His?
- So let's begin with the first of these four examples

[Matt. 5:31](#) "It was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE';

[Matt. 5:32](#) but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

- So Jesus' third example compares the Pharisees' teaching on divorce with God's view of divorce from the Scriptures
 - Let me begin by acknowledging divorce is a sensitive and emotionally charged issue
 - Many of our lives have been touched by divorce
 - And it's always a painful and often embarrassing experience
 - Nevertheless, it's important we understand the Bible's perspective on this topic...and we will in time
 - But in this chapter, Jesus is using divorce as an example on a larger point...divorce is not His main point, no more than murder or lust was
 - Furthermore, Jesus returns to this topic again, later in this Gospel, in Chapter 19
 - And at that time, Jesus will go into much greater detail on the subject
 - So I will wait until then to address the subject of divorce in greater detail
- So for now, we'll focus on understanding Jesus' point in this example
 - Jesus quotes from the Mishnah ("it was said" not "as it is written") where it paraphrases Deuteronomy 24
 - In that law, Moses commanded that a man who divorces his wife must send her away with a certificate of divorce
 - But Jesus says, that whoever divorces his wife "makes" her commit adultery

- To understand how these two statements relate, we need to appreciate the culture of Jesus' day
- In the ancient east, women had no legal standing
 - Generally speaking, they couldn't own land or own a business
 - They couldn't testify in court or enter into contracts
 - So a woman had no way to support herself in the culture
 - Moreover, women generally didn't possess sufficient upper body strength to handle the strenuous effort required to work the land
 - So a woman in Jesus' day literally had no way to provide for herself through labor
- Therefore, women relied on men to survive
 - During the first part of her life, a young girl lived under her father's roof, depending on his support
 - Later, when she married, she was supported by her husband for the rest of her life
 - If she was widowed, she would move in with a son or brother-in-law
- But if that woman's husband lost interest in her and kicked her out of the house, she faced a desperate situation
 - Not only was her marriage falling apart, but she was at risk of losing her only means of support
 - She would be set out of the house with the clothes on her back and little else
 - There would be no alimony or child support
 - She wasn't going to get a divorce settlement
 - And generally speaking, she couldn't return to her father's house, since she was considered the property of her husband
 - And to make matters worse, the woman was still considered married
 - Which meant that no other man would consider giving her shelter either

- A respectable man would never spend private time in the company of a married woman, especially in his home
- That man could be accused of adultery
- Therefore, a woman abandoned by her husband was literally without hope
 - Unfortunately, this happened commonly in ancient life
 - Hard-hearted and cruel men abandoned their wives routinely, simply because they tired of her or wanted someone else
 - They left these poor women destitute and helpless, without a means of support
 - Such a woman was in real danger of starvation or abuse or death by exposure
 - Her best chance for survival was to depend on the mercy of strangers or family members, eking out a meager life as a beggar
 - The story of Ruth and Naomi is an example of such a situation
 - So to correct this injustice, God said to Israel, in Deuteronomy 24:1, that if a man is determined to divorce his wife, he must give her a certificate of divorce
 - The husband couldn't kick his wife out of the house with nothing
 - He had to give her a certificate of divorce
 - With a certificate of divorce, the woman had a reasonable chance of finding another man to take pity on her and marry her
 - Another man could take her as a wife without fear of being charged with adultery
- But reading the Law carefully, it's clear that God was not approving of the man's decision to divorce his wife
 - The Lord was simply commanding the man to show some mercy to his victim
 - God did not intended Deuteronomy 24 to become a license to engage in divorce and remarriage
 - It's similar to the case of another law

Ex. 22:16 “If a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her, he must pay a dowry for her to be his wife.

- That Law says, that a man who seduces a woman outside of marriage, must pay a dowry to the family and marry the girl he seduced
 - Scripture is clear that having sex with a woman before you marry her is always a sin... 100% of the time... we call it fornication
 - But in Exodus 22, God addresses the aftermath of fornication, because He knew sinful men were going to sin in this way
 - He obligated the man to make amends for his sin by marrying the girl
 - Obviously, Exodus 22:16 doesn't mean God thinks it's ok to engage in fornication
- Likewise, just because God made accommodation for divorce, doesn't mean He approves of it
 - Nevertheless, the Pharisees had taken Deuteronomy 24 to be just that... a license to divorce
 - They assumed God wouldn't have made allowance for a certificate of divorce if He didn't see a need for it at times
- So they set about to define in the Mishnah the many reasons that justified a divorce
 - Over the years, the Pharisees invented a long list of such reasons
 - None of these reasons were found in Scripture itself, the rabbis simply imagined them
 - The most ridiculous of these rules stated that a husband was justified in divorcing his wife if she burned his soup
 - With rules like that, it's obvious that these men were simply looking for any reason they could to end marriage
- But as silly as these rules seem to us, the Pharisees said they were equal to Scripture because they were part of the “oral law”
 - Ironically, their rules were supposedly intended to limit divorce

- Yet, because of those rules, it became easier and easier for men in Israel to do the very thing God said he hates
- And all the while, they assumed God approved of their behavior because the Pharisees said it was OK
- So once again, Jesus sets the record straight
 - In v.32, Jesus says, that despite Deuteronomy 24, and despite the Mishnah, everyone who divorces his wife makes her commit adultery
 - Given the background I gave you earlier, we can understand what Jesus means when He says, a man “makes” his wife commit adultery
 - By ending the marriage, the husband essentially forced his wife to seek shelter under another man’s roof
 - So in that sense, the husband made her commit adultery because her only other option was starvation
 - But even more challenging, Jesus says that when that next man marries the divorced woman, he too commits adultery
 - That probably shocked the crowd listening to Jesus
 - Everyone in Jesus’ day assumed this new husband was in the clear because that woman came with that certificate of divorce
 - But Jesus says that certificate didn’t change the situation from God’s point of view
 - That certificate was simply intended to make the best of a bad situation by preserving the life of the woman
 - That certificate didn’t actually end the first marriage vows...it just gave the woman a chance for survival
 - Because if the choice is between the woman’s death and adultery, adultery is the better of the two
 - That certificate doesn’t mean that the marriage has ceased – adultery is still adultery
 - The husband’s choice to divorce his wife was a sin, and it led to a chain of sin, by his wife and the next man

- So we could summarize Jesus' teaching simply by saying, if you want to please God, honor your marriage as a lifelong bond
- As I might say to my kids...one wife per life, one man is God's plan
- Now, you probably noticed Jesus mentions an exception in v.32
 - I want to wait until Chapter 19 to discuss this exception in detail
 - For now, simply note that grammatically speaking, Jesus' exception applies to the second half of that verse
 - We could reword the sentence this way... "everyone who divorces his wife makes her commit adultery except in the case of unchastity"
 - Jesus was simply saying that a husband can't be guilty of making his wife commit adultery if she beat him to it...if she committed adultery first
 - One last thing, I will say on this topic today...while divorce is a sin, it's not an unforgivable sin, and it's not worse than other sins
 - Remember earlier, Jesus said that those who have called a person a fool have broken the sixth commandment against murder
 - And He said that those who have lusted have broken the commandment against adultery
 - So how many of you have hated a person? How many have lusted?
 - And some of us have divorced, but I ask everyone...is the sin of divorce worse than our violations of the sixth and seventh commandments?
 - And more importantly, did Jesus die to cover the sin of divorce, or only to cover your sin?
 - Obviously, He died for all of us because we all have sin, no matter what kind
 - And so, we have no basis for judging anyone in the body of Christ concerning their life circumstances or past
 - We all stand by the grace of God in the atoning work of Christ

- And so our only priority on this topic, or any other, is to encourage everyone to learn what the Word says so we can all do better in the future
- Let's move to the next example for today, beginning in v.33

Matt. 5:33 "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.'

Matt. 5:34 "But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,

Matt. 5:35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING.

Matt. 5:36 "Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

Matt. 5:37 "But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil.

- The next example begins with our tell-tale phrase "you have heard", indicating another quote from the Mishnah is coming
 - In this case, Jesus quotes the Mishnah's command concerning the taking of oaths
 - In the written Word of God, the Lord said in Numbers 30, that we are obligated to keep our vows
 - In Leviticus 27, the Lord warns that failure to keep our vows, even unintentionally, will bring the consequences of the vow
 - In ancient times, written contracts weren't common, so a verbal agreement was usually the only way business was done
 - Those verbal agreements were solemn, and if a man wasn't trustworthy, no one would do business with him
 - We have contracts now, but this principle still applies in modern life
 - For example, we vow to pay back a loan
 - We vow to fulfill our enlistment obligation in the military honorably
 - We take an oath to tell the truth on a witness stand

- And speaking of marriage, in the ceremony, we vow to remain married for life
- The Word of God says keep your vows or suffer the consequences
- But of course, the Pharisees took the spirit of God's Law regarding oaths and tossed it aside
 - In the oral law, they expanded greatly on what God said concerning oaths
 - They invented an array of ways men could take oaths
 - And they imagined an equal variety of ways that oaths could be broken or excused
 - For example, the Pharisees created an elaborate system for determining whether an oath was truly binding
 - The binding nature of an oath depended upon what the promisor swore by
 - For example, a person swearing by God's name was always bound to keep his oath because the Pharisees said God was eternal
 - But swearing by heavens and earth was not binding they said, since the heavens and earth were not eternal
 - And if a man swore his oath while facing toward Jerusalem, then the Pharisees said it was binding
 - But if he swore while facing *away* from Jerusalem, it wasn't
 - The effect of these convoluted rules was encouraging deceit and fraud in business dealings
 - A man could construct his oath concerning some manner in such a way that he knew it wouldn't be binding
 - Only later, would the victim discover that his agreement wasn't enforceable in court
 - It's the equivalent of the small print in a contract
 - In Acts 23:40, men take an oath not to eat or drink until they killed the Apostle Paul

- In the end, Paul escaped, but we never hear what happened to these men
- They almost certainly didn't keep their vow, because the Mishnah had an exception for something called, "restraint"
- These men were restrained, or prevented, from fulfilling their vow, so they were released from it, the Pharisees would say
- Of course, Jesus denounces the Mishnah's stupid rules on oaths
 - In v.34, Jesus says swearing by Heaven is just as binding as swearing by God Himself, because Heaven is the throne of God
 - Likewise in v.35, Jesus says swearing by earth is equally binding as swearing by God because it's the footstool of God's feet
 - And regardless of which way you face, swearing by Jerusalem is always binding because it's God's city in the Kingdom
 - Jesus wasn't validating the Pharisee's silly categorization of oaths, He was simply exposing how ludicrous their logic was
 - Once again, God made something clear in His word
 - Then later, in their oral law, the Pharisees took the spirit of what God says and perverted it
 - They contrived a set of rules that turned God's Word on its head by making it easy to divorce or break a vow
 - They called their rules an "oral law" to fool people into thinking that God would be pleased when they did as they pleased
 - In reality, those rules led people away from obedience and righteousness, and into sin
- So in the matter of making vows or oaths, what does righteousness require?
 - Jesus said it begins with understanding our place in God's economy
 - In v.36, Jesus says you shouldn't make guarantees about things you can't control...it's taking a needless gamble and it's evil
 - Someone might swear an oath upon their own head, meaning they put their own life as a ransom, should they fail to keep their oath

- But Jesus says you can't even change the color of your own hair, so how can you assure anyone of what you can do in the future?
- This example doesn't seem to work as well today, in our age of hair coloring
 - But the example still applies, because coloring your hair doesn't change its actual color
 - You're just covering it up
- So if you can't control even the least thing on your own body, why place so much at risk over things you have no hope to control?
 - Jesus' point is, that God's Word on oaths wasn't intended to encourage people to enter into them
 - And He certainly didn't want us to set rules for how to make oaths non-binding
 - On the contrary, the Lord was trying to steer us away from oaths altogether
- So Jesus says, the spirit of God's Law was to encourage men to simply state their intentions honestly as "yes" or "no" without need for additional promises
 - If you operate this way, you will never have need to make oaths
 - Because your word will be respected and trusted, based on your history of doing what you say
 - Then, we never have need to put ourselves in jeopardy of violating an oath
 - To operate any other way is evil, Jesus says
- In v.38, Jesus moves to the Mishnah's laws on retribution

Matt. 5:38 "You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.'

Matt. 5:39 "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

Matt. 5:40 "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.

Matt. 5:41 "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two.

[Matt. 5:42](#) "Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.

- Jesus quotes from the Mishnah's take on Exodus 21:24, where the Lord told Israel that justice should be measured out proportionally
 - The Law uses euphemistic examples to say let the punishment fit the crime
 - An eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, so to speak
 - We shouldn't demand something more valuable than was taken from us
 - An eye is far more valuable than a single tooth, so don't demand an eye for a tooth
- But of course, you know what the Pharisees did here, right?
 - They took this law hyper-literally, so they could turn it into a license for personal vengeance
 - So according to their Mishnah, a Jew could take personal revenge against someone who harmed them, so long as they only took one tooth or one eye, etc.
- But the Lord wasn't advocating taking personal revenge, much less maiming people
 - God was placing a governor on our tendency to react in sinful ways against those who offend us, by requiring that we not go beyond what was done to us
 - He was limiting retribution to ensure that punishment didn't become excessive
 - The true spirit of that law was to encourage mercy
 - Said another way, if excessive punishment is sin, then showing undeserved favor (grace) is righteousness
 - God's heart is to encourage mercy for those who offend us
 - So Jesus says, if you want to follow the spirit of the Law, you'll show no interest in retribution whatsoever
 - Let them strike you without striking back

- Respond to their unreasonable requests by surprising them with your generosity
- When they borrow and don't return, let them borrow again anyway
- And when they impose upon you by their unreasonable requests, respond as though you wanted to do it anyway
- Now, if you're hearing Jesus' list and wondering if there are any exceptions to these rules, then you're still thinking like a Pharisee
 - Instead of looking for ways to limit our obedience to God's Word, we need to embrace the spirit of what God is saying
 - Righteousness means looking like God and not like ourselves
- So the right question to ask is, "How would God respond in these situations? What would Jesus do?"
 - For example, what did Jesus do when they slapped Him on the cheek?
 - Was that attack deserved? Did Jesus have a right to respond against His attackers?
 - Jesus had done nothing wrong
 - So couldn't He have retaliated and still been righteous?
 - Actually, no...He couldn't, because it wouldn't have been in keeping with the Father's will
 - And that's the point...it's the Father's will, and our obedience to that will, that determines our righteousness
 - Jesus had a right to respond, but righteousness required He do something else
 - Jesus had to go to that cross as the Father determined, so that He could complete the plan of redemption that we all depend upon now
 - Can you live like that? With eyes for eternity...making decisions now that support God's eternal purposes?
- As you listen to these examples, I bet you've been hearing them from the perspective of the injured party...the one offended

- But have you ever considered that you are the offender? Even more sobering, have you considered you were an offender to God Himself?
 - You were the sinner, the one who offended God
 - And then one day, you came to Christ seeking His mercy
- In that moment, you were the one demanding things from God that you had no right to have
 - You were the evil person that Jesus didn't resist when you called upon Him for mercy
 - You were the one who asked Jesus to walk a mile with you, and He surprised you with His generosity
- Because when you asked Jesus to forgive you for your sins, Jesus went a long way beyond just forgiving you
 - The Bible says that by your faith, He adopted you as a child of God, making you part of the family of God
 - He also has made you a fellow heir in His Kingdom
 - He has promised you a place in His government and a share of His inheritance
 - And He placed His Spirit in you, giving you access to the mind of God by His Word
- Jesus went the extra mile for us and we certainly didn't deserve it
 - So how can we refuse our Lord, when He asked us to be His hands and feet to this lost and dying world?
 - How can we refuse to live according to the spirit of His Law when He has already accomplished all that it requires on our behalf?
- If you're searching for the big take-away from this chapter, let me say it plainly
 - Heaven is a tall order...taller than you can reach
 - You can't get there on your own, because you can't measure up
 - But Jesus could and did
 - So now we live as His disciple, seeking to please Him and represent Him

- But you can't do that effectively if you revert to following rules that were worthless in the first place
- Stop listening to others' "do's" and "don't's", or even the ones in your own head
- Get into the Word of God and stay there
 - And as you do, you'll be amazed by two things
 - First, you'll be continually humbled by how far you are from the standards of righteousness that God requires
 - You'll understand why Jesus had to live and die for you, because you'll see clearly that you had no chance to do it for yourself
 - And that recognition will serve to increase your appreciation for the grace you've received in Christ
- And then secondly, as you continue in your studies, you'll be amazed at how much your heart is changing by what you learn
 - You'll find yourself thinking and acting differently
 - Almost instinctively, you'll begin living by the spirit of the Word, where before, you couldn't even follow the letter of the Law
 - And that recognition will serve to increase your love for Christ and your devotion to Him
- If you want to receive Christ's righteousness, if you want assurance that you will be in the Kingdom, come up here after the last song and let me tell you about placing your faith in Jesus Christ