

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 intend 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 23:14, 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 said 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 disciples, 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, then place your faith in Jesus Christ