

Stage IV. The Great Galilean Ministry

E. The Appointment of the Twelve Apostles and “Teaching on the Mount”

5. Teaching on the Mount, Part IV:

Love Deals Righteously With Sexuality, Marriage, and Promise-Keeping

The DAILY JESUS NEWS #071

Base Text: MT 5. 27-37 (Parallel Text: None)

27 *“You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY' (Ex. 20.14).*

28 *“But I myself tell you that anyone who continues to look at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

29 *“If your right eye is causing you to stumble, I command you to 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 stumble, I command you to 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.' (Duet. 24.1)*

32 *“But I myself tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman is committing adultery.*

33 *“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'DO NOT BREAK YOUR OATH, BUT FULFILL THE OATHS YOU HAVE MADE TO THE LORD.' (Duet. 23.21)*

34 *“But I myself command you not to swear an oath 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 *“All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”*

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in “blended texts” as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This “superscript ID” is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *the words of Jesus are italicized in red*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	On a Mountain in Galilee
Timeline	May, 31 AD (Month Sixteen)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage IV: The Great Galilean Ministry
	E. The Appointment of the Twelve Apostles and “Teaching on the Mount”
Title	5. Teaching on the Mount, Part IV: Purity of Heart in Sexuality, Marriage, and Promise-Keeping

COMMENT:

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After dealing with the issues of anger and broken relationships in God's kind of love, Jesus next turned to a sequence of more three examples illustrating how he came to fulfill the law with God's kind of righteousness. We can see how he used the **"you have heard"** phrase to introduce the related issues of sexual purity (5.27), marriage/divorce (5.31), and promise-keeping (5.33). These three issues are closely related, and Jesus moves through them in a natural progression here.

Once again, the issue is mere observance of the letter of the law, versus true heart-righteousness that is created by living in God's kind of love. Jesus came to fulfill the law by filling us with his love.

The 7th of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20.14) was to avoid committing adultery. Like murder, Jesus made it clear that merely avoiding physical adultery did not fulfill the law at all. Righteousness is a matter of our attitude--the heart. So Jesus explained that the inner compulsion to have sexual relations with a person we are not married to--when it is a consistent ongoing desire-- is the same thing as committing the physical act.

The question in evaluating "lust" is twofold. First, is it an ongoing, consistent desire? Jesus used a verb tense that described sustained, continuous longing here. In other words, the person is dwelling on their desire. Secondly, if the circumstances permitted, the person who is "lusting" would definitely act on that desire--especially if it could be kept secret. The only thing stopping the "desire" from being physically fulfilled is the opportunity to act.

Jesus is saying that cultivating a desire that we want to act on, but cannot, is the same thing as engaging in the act. Our heart desires determine our purity, not just our physical actions. Therefore, Jesus commanded us to deal with the desires of our heart as decisively as we deal with our bodies if they are diseased.

Jesus was not advocating physical dismemberment to create purity of heart! HE is the one who knows how fruitless that is, for HE is the one who knows our hearts. Rather, Jesus is telling us to deal as decisively with our hearts as we do our bodies when our life is on the line. If we have cancer we cut it out. If we have impure hearts we must cut out that spiritual cancer with the same decisiveness.

Thinking about heart purity in sexuality naturally leads into consideration of marriage--or its termination in divorce--because marriage is the only appropriate context for sexual relations. This was the first of three statements Jesus made about divorce (and marriage) in his ministry. (The others are LK 16.18 and MK 10.1-12/MT 19.1-12).

Jesus' contemporaries saw nothing wrong with divorce, if it was conducted in accordance with the law (Duet. 24.1) that prescribed it. In other words, pursuing a divorce and remarriage, as long as the divorce followed the legal procedure, was a totally righteous act for them. No failure or sin was involved, as long as the proper paperwork was processed. But is this really righteous?

Once again, Jesus went to the heart of the matter. The act of divorce is an expression of the ultimate unfaithfulness to our partner in Jesus' mind. Merely following the proper legal procedure does not make divorce a righteous action. For whatever reason, divorce involves giving up on the unconditional love and commitment to our marriage partner with which we began the marriage. Making the decision to abandon that commitment is analogous to committing adultery, whether one has committed physical adultery or not.

Jesus is not saying that divorce is the unforgivable sin here. Nor is he saying that remarriage is inherently wrong. What he IS saying is that the dissolution of a marriage is a serious thing, a tragedy, and that it inevitably involves a failure to love. Like sexual purity, marital faithfulness is a matter of the heart. Just going through the proper legal procedure does not make divorce inherently righteous before God. True heart righteousness is much more than following the correct legal procedures. It is a matter of loving each other as he has first loved us. One cannot end a marriage in divorce without acknowledging that both parties have failed to love each other as Jesus has first loved us.

Marriage is a covenant; a promise. So Jesus next moved into the issues of making oaths. People in Jesus' day were used to making oaths on the basis of things that were more reliable than themselves, such as God, the Temple, or the holy city. Jesus said none of that was a good thing. Instead, we should strive to be people of such veracity that a simple "yes" or "no" itself is more than sufficient. We should be people who are known for keeping their

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promises, just as God is. If our word alone is not trustworthy, it means that we ourselves are not trustworthy, and we need to change. Once again, it is a matter of the heart.

Jesus was turning the common cultural expectations of his contemporaries upside down with his emphasis on righteousness as purity of heart, not mere proper outward behavior. Only God, who omnisciently sees and fully knows our hearts can speak like Jesus did about inner purity.

Notice that when Jesus repeatedly said, "**You have heard it said...**" He was referring to the Old Testament. Then he said: "**But I myself tell you...**" Jesus was making his own word not just equal to Scripture, but even superior to it, because Jesus made his own word the normative understanding for the meaning of the Old Testament. This was a serious Divine claim to authority. It meant Jesus claimed to know our hearts as only God does, and interpret Scripture as only the Giver of the Word has the authority to interpret. These statements were Divine claims.

APPLICATION:

Sexual purity is a matter of the heart. So is building a marriage. Being people who are known for keeping our word is the foundation of personal integrity, and that is also a matter of the heart.

Living in God's kind of unconditional love makes a profound difference in each of these areas of life. That difference is God's kind of righteousness formed within those who follow Jesus by faith.

How does Jesus' view of sexual purity impact you?

How does Jesus' view of divorce as adultery speak to you?

How does being a person of your word challenge you?

Thank God for his forgiveness when we fall short, and his grace to change our hearts. Once again, that is why mourning, poverty of spirit, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and meekness are required attitudes for those who follow Jesus, and lead us into true contentment!