

This Present Kingdom
Week 5 - Kingdom Disorientation - Part Two
Matthew 5:31-48

The Sermon on the Mount teaches us what it means to be a citizen of Christ's Kingdom. In Christ, we have a righteousness that extends beyond externals and religious conformity. Believers have been judiciously declared righteous in the eyes of God who has imputed on our behalf the substitutionary victorious death of Christ.

In Matthew 5:21-48, Jesus gave six examples that contrast His own authority, as the original author and ultimate interpreter of the Law, with the false authority of the rabbinic oral tradition. In understanding this portion of the sermon, we need to understand the context.

These points in the Sermon on the Mount are presented as “samples”. That is, the sermon was not intended to be an exhaustive list of every possible instance of application, but a pattern which is to be learned, and then generalized to all attitudes, words, and actions in our lives. In 5:21–48, Jesus presented six examples supporting His thesis (5:20). He could easily have provided more. But His purpose was not to teach every possible example, but a way of thinking. This approach would prepare believers for every possible situation they would face.

The insights to be gained here about murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, revenge, and love are valuable. But we miss the entire message of the sermon if we do not take the single underlying principle and learn how to apply it to the infinite number of decisions that we face throughout our lives. That underlying principle is: *Seek and apply the heart intention of God's instruction, not merely the letter of it.* This is impossible to do on a human level. But as we seek Him with all our hearts, He will reveal it to us (Proverbs 2:1–8; Jeremiah 29:13) (Stuart Weber, Matthew, p. 66).

The Pharisees had invented all manner of ingenious ways of working around the intentions of God's Word, reducing the Law to a list of rules and regulations. This is little more than behavior modification and at its very best can only make one appear to be spiritual in the eyes of men, but can never find favor with God. Those who belong to the Kingdom of God have experienced a heart change that produces a transformed life.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus contrasted the current acceptable interpretation of Jewish Law with the higher standard of Kingdom living. A changed heart produces a transformed life from the inside out. Paul wrote in Colossians 2:20-23,

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!’ (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These matters which

have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

I. God's Plan for Marriage - Matthew 5:31-32

God instituted marriage. From the beginning, God intended monogamous, life-long marriage to be the only pattern of union between men and women. In Genesis 2:24, God said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

Divorce was rampant in the Jewish culture. Jesus addressed this issue, although these two verses can hardly be thought to represent the sum total of our Lord's instruction about divorce and remarriage. They seem to give a summary of His teaching and are essentially a call to fidelity in marriage.

Fiercely held positions concerning the practice fell out along the lines of two popularly held, but diametrically opposed, rival rabbinical schools. Rabbi Shammai maintained a conservative view based on Deuteronomy 24:1, while Rabbi Hillel was teaching that you could put away your wife for any reason, up to and including, things like if she burned your dinner or disrespected your parents or if her voice was too loud. Jesus' purpose in these two verses was not to explain every detail regarding divorce and remarriage, but to help people think differently about the Law, to help them see the spirit of the Law and not just the letter of the Law.

Jesus narrowed the allowable reasons for justifiable divorce to adultery. Even in such cases He was not commanding that an adulterous spouse be divorced, but allowing such recourse for the wounded spouse offended by adultery. Divorce is to be the last resort, permitted in the face of ongoing, unrepentant, adulterous destruction of the marriage covenant. The heart of God is always for repentance and restoration, although that is not always possible if the offending party refuses to repent.

II. God's Perspective on Vows - Matthew 5:33-37

Jesus addressed the issue of vows. This is not a reference to cursing or profanity (which is warned against in a number of places in the Bible, see Ephesians 4:29) but the practice of using oaths to affirm that what is said is true. The Old Testament permitted people to take an oath invoking God's name but such an oath was binding. The Pharisees taught that oaths which did not include the name of God were not binding, creating a convenient loophole when pledges were made. To avoid using Jehovah's name, they invented all kinds of oaths to add weight to their statements without putting them in jeopardy if they broke their word. They swore by Heaven, by earth, by the holy city, and even by their own heads.

Jesus swept all such oaths aside. He showed that ultimately they all referred to God, for Heaven is God's throne, the earth is His footstool, Jerusalem is the city of the great King, and their heads were made by Him. Man cannot make a single hair black

or white to crown the head of youth or old age (John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary*).

Jesus taught the higher standard Kingdom servants are to uphold: we are to be people of godly character which translates into integrity. This negates the need to attach oaths as guarantees of sincerity. Kingdom dwellers are to be truth-tellers and promise keepers.

III. God's Purpose for Justice - Matthew 5:38-42

The Law maintained "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" (Exodus 21:24-25; Leviticus 24:20). The law was not given to exact revenge but to legislate justice through the legal system. The punishment was fit the crime, so to speak.

What God had given as a restriction on civil courts, Jewish tradition had turned into personal license for retaliation. Each man was basically allowed to be judge, jury, and executor by meting out his own brand of justice and exacting revenge. Kingdom dwellers are called to refuse attitudes of personal resentment, spite, and vengeance. Jesus addresses four areas of basic human rights and uses them as examples of lifestyles that characterize Kingdom citizens.

A. Dignity - Among Jews, a slap on the face was among the most contemptuous acts because it was a demeaning to personal dignity. Turning the other cheek and offering to receive more of the same indicated a willingness to be offended without retaliating. Peter tells us that Jesus left us an example to follow "while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). When someone attacks our right to dignity, we are called not to retaliate but rather the to leave the defense in God's hands.

B. Security - In Bible times, the shirt was a type of tunic worn as an undergarment and the coat was the outer garment which also served as bedding or a blanket at night.

Jesus is not speaking of a robbery, in which a person tries to steal your clothes, but of the legitimate claim of **anyone who wants to sue you**. When a person had no money or other possessions, the court often would require the fine or judgment be paid by clothing. The attitude of a Kingdom citizen, one who is truly righteous, should be willingness to surrender even one's **coat**, his extremely valuable outer garment, rather than cause offense or hard feelings with an adversary. The court could not demand the **coat**, but it could be voluntarily given to meet the required debt. And that is precisely what Jesus says we should be willing to do (John MacArthur, *Matthew*, p. 334).

C. Liberty - Roman law gave a soldier the right to force a civilian to carry his pack and/or military equipment for a mile. This obviously created great animosity between the Jews and their oppressors. Jesus' Kingdom servants, in representing the gracious spirit of their

King, are to go above and beyond what is required. We are to “go the extra mile,” as it were.

D. Possessions – Selfishness is a characteristic of the fallen nature. It is this propensity that Jesus was addressing. We do have the right to keep and use what we have earned. However, even that right is to be placed on the altar of obedience.

When someone asks to **borrow** something from us, we should not **turn away from him**. In other words, we should give him what he wants. The implication is that the person who asks has a genuine need. We are not required to respond to every foolish, selfish request made of us. Sometimes to give a person what he wants but does not need is a disservice, doing him more harm than good.

Also implied is the principle that we should offer to give what is needed as soon as we know of the need, whether or not we are asked for help. Jesus is not speaking of begrudging acquiescence to a plea for help, but willing, generous, and loving desire to help others. He is speaking of generosity that genuinely wants to meet the other person’s need, not tokenism that does a good deed to buy off one’s own conscience (John MacArthur, *Matthew*, p. 335).

John wrote, “But whoever has the world’s good, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in Him?” (1 John 3:17). As Christians, we are to hold everything we have with an open hand as good stewards of His provisions in our lives, ready to share and give according to God’s direction.

IV. God’s Pattern for Maturity - Matthew 5:43-48

In His sixth illustration contrasting the self-righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees with the true righteousness of God, Jesus differentiates their kind of love with God’s. Nowhere does works-based religious effort differ more from God’s divine standard than in the matter of love.

Leviticus 19:18 says in part, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The Pharisees had lifted out the clause “You shall love your neighbor” and added the phrase “and hate your enemy” (Matthew 5:43), blatantly distorting God’s Word. As Kingdom citizens “the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5). When we operate in the realm of God’s love, other will “see our good works, and glorify our Father who is in Heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Jesus reminded His hearers that our Christian faith is of little worth if it generates no loftier love than that displayed by the tax collectors and Gentiles. His reference to them also served to remind the Jews of their nearly universal prejudice and hatred against both groups!

To reinforce that Kingdom living goes far beyond keeping external rules, Jesus summed up this section saying, “Therefore, you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”

(Matthew 5:48). According to Strong's Concordance, the word *perfect* in the original language means "mature, full grown, adult, wanting nothing necessary to completeness, brought to an end, finished." Jesus goes straight to the heart of the matter. A changed heart produces a transformed life. This progressive transformation leads to ever-increasing spiritual maturity. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life." Luke 6:45 says, "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart."

As we mature in the Lord and grow in His grace and knowledge of the Word, **our practice** gradually begins to match **our position** in Christ. This is the essence of Kingdom living, not a life built on rules and religious rituals, but one based on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ!

"The Kingdom way is costly, challenging, but possible in the power of the Holy Spirit" (*This Present Kingdom*, p. 119).

Spiritual Discipline of Meditation

The purpose of meditating on God's Word is to set aside dedicated time to reflect on God's Word in order to understand who He is and what His instructions are for living the Kingdom life. Purpose in your heart to develop the discipline of mediating on the Lord and His Word. Determine to aggressively pursue personal holiness and practical righteousness as a citizen of *This Present Kingdom*!