

LESSON 7: RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE KINGDOM (PART I: Matt. 5:21-30)

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** Today we continue our study of the greatest sermon ever preached by the greatest preacher that ever lived...Jesus' sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7; cf. Lk. 6:20-38; 11 & 12).
2. **3** Recall that last time we considered: *Jesus and the Law* (Matt. 5:17-20).
3. At the close of that section Jesus made the statement, "*For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matt. 5:20)
 - A. Remember how "jarring" that statement must have been!
 - (1) "*For I say to you*" sent a commotion through the crowd as Jesus clearly asserts His divine authority.
 - (2) The second part of the statement is a frontal assault upon those who the people considered the very epitome of "religiousness."
 - B. His statement issues a huge challenge to anyone seeking to be a citizen in His kingdom.
4. **4** Now in vv. 21-48 Jesus gives six concrete examples illustrating the righteousness of which He speaks.
 - A. In this section Jesus helps those with good and honest hearts to see themselves as God sees them (see esp. Matt. 5:3-6; **I Sam. 16:7**: "*For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.*").

******"If that does not make a person squirm, then he probably is not understanding what he is reading." (John Smith, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 34)
 - B. ****** What Jesus teaches here (i.e., the standard to which our righteousness must rise) should challenge us to the very core of our being and permeate how we view every aspect of our lives; every thought as well as every action.
 - C. ****** An important BTW: After we come to an understanding of the righteousness Jesus requires of kingdom citizens it should forever put to rest in our minds the notion that one must show us "proof texts" specifically forbidding such things as social drinking, smoking, dancing, mixed swimming, immodest dress, etc.
5. **5** With this lesson Jesus further contrasts the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees with the righteousness required in His kingdom. (**Matt. 5:20**: "*For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*")

II. Discussion:

1. **6** *Murder begins in the heart*: Matt. 5:21-26
 - A. First, we need to address in a general way the contrasts Jesus is making. Six times He draws a contrast between:

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time,"
 (vv. 21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43)
 versus
"But I say unto you"
 (vv. 22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44)

- (1) Many assume He is contrasting the Old Covenant with the New Covenant.
- (a) ** Some support this view by saying the Law of Moses dealt only with ‘externals,’ i.e., “*thou shalt not...*” (e.g., Ex. 20:13-16).
 - (b) Not entirely true! The Law of Moses plainly dealt with more than just ‘externals’ (Ex. 20:17; **Matt. 22:37-40**: “*Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.*”).
- Psa. 51:17**: “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart — These, O God, You will not despise.*”
- Prov. 4:23**: “*Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.*”
- (2) **7** So, Jesus is not merely contrasting the Old with the New. Consider:
- (a) That Jesus would now affirm the Law of Moses taught one thing and He quite another is entirely inconsistent with vv. 17-19!
 - (b) When Jesus quoted from the Old Testament He almost universally introduced it with the phrase “*it is written*” (e.g., Matt. 4:4, 7, 10) or “*have ye not read*” (e.g., Matt. 22:31) not with “*it was said by them of old time.*”
 - (c) The apostles used the same phraseology (e.g., James in Acts 15:15: “*And with this the words of the prophets agree...*”; Paul in Acts 23:5: “*for it is written*” or Rom. 1:17: “*as it is written*”).
- (3) **8** The contrast is between how rabbinic teachers (e.g., scribes and Pharisees) interpreted and applied the Law of Moses versus what God’s word really teaches.
- (4) In modern parlance, people like the scribes and Pharisees were “spin doctors” who had their own “interpretations” and “applications” of the Law (e.g., **Mk. 7:9-13**: “*He said to them, ‘All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. 13 ‘And many such things you do.’*”).
- (5) ** So, by these contrasts Jesus is sweeping away the “spin” and getting to the heart of the true righteousness kingdom citizens must possess.
- B. **9** In the first contrast, Jesus addresses the sixth commandment, “*You shall not murder.*” (Ex. 20:13).
- C. ** The scribes and Pharisees taught the truth on this, but their teaching did not go far enough.
- (1) They had merely reduced murder to a civil matter (v. 21; “*judgment*” = council). As long as you don’t actually kill someone and get yourself arrested that’s all that matters.
 - (2) Only taking the law this far makes almost everyone feel comfortable, for how many folks have actually committed a homicide?
- D. **10** But Jesus gets to the very core of the matter by focusing attention on not just the ‘letter of the law,’ but also on the ‘spirit of the law.’
- (1) Again, He’s not giving a new law! **Lev. 19:17-18**: “*You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. 18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.*”; cf. Matt. 22:39-40
 - (2) Rather, He’s correcting their misunderstanding of the law! ** Matt. 15:17-20

- E. **11** Just think of it: Homicide would cease to exist if men did not allow the thoughts and attitudes of the heart that lead to it to never arise in their consciousness! **Prov. 4:23:** “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.”

******“What of the man who wants to kill, or at the very least cause pain to another person, but circumstances prevent him, or he is too cowardly to complete the deed? Jesus clearly condemns the abuse of human life, and views murder as more than a physical act, but mental as well.” (John Smith, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 34)

- F. **12** Jesus refers to three expressions of ‘murderous thoughts’:

- (1) ****** Angry without cause: **Matt. 5:21-22a:** “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ 22 But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.”
 - (a) Anger isn’t wrong per se (**Psa. 7:11:** “God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day.”).
 - (b) But, anger can easily get out of hand and lead one to desire to seek the worst for another person (**2 Kgs. 5:12:** Naaman “turned and went away in a rage.”; **Prov. 14:29:** “He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly.”; **Prov. 16:32;** **Jas. 1:19-20:** “...let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; 20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”; **1 Jn. 3:15:** “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer...”).

“Anger that manifests itself in unloving and unkind actions, words, or thoughts causes one to be guilty—as guilty as the murderer!” (John Smith, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 35)
- (2) ****** Declare a person to be ‘Raca’: **Matt. 5:22:** “And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council.”
 - (a) *Raca* is an Aramaic word of contempt and scorn (“empty-headed,” Vine or “block head,” TDNT; Strong: “a term of utter vilification.”; Vine: “intellectually rather than morally, ‘empty-headed’”).
 - (b) Such an attitude may not lead to the physical act of murder, but such words are designed to assassinate one’s character and reputation, to destroy their self-image and cause mental anguish.
- (3) ****** Declare a person to be a fool: **Matt. 5:22:** “But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”
 - (a) This word is from the same root word as *Raca*, but somewhat stronger (“Thou fool”; here the word means morally worthless, a scoundrel, a more serious reproach than ‘Raca’; the latter scorns a man’s mind and calls him stupid; *moros* scorns his heart and character”, Vine).
 - (b) Jesus is reiterating what He’s already said in even stronger language.

“‘Fool’ is a term which expresses more than want of wisdom; it means stupid fool, vile apostate; impious wretch; it expresses a stronger degree of reproach and contempt than *Raca*, and hence an intenser passion and hate which led to its utterance. This word embodies a bitter judgment of one’s spiritual state and decrees him to certain destruction.” (Boles, H. L., *The Gospel According to Matthew*, pp. 135-136)

- G. The more I read this section the more I doubt Jesus’ main point is simply describing progressive stages of crime and punishment.

- (1) Rather, the expressions He presents is meant to show how quickly our anger can get out of control (Eph. 4:26; Prov. 14:29; **Prov. 27:4**: “*Wrath is cruel and anger a torrent, but who is able to stand before jealousy?*”).
 - (a) Simple anger quickly escalates to contempt (“*angry without cause*” to calling someone “*Raca*” or “block head”)
 - (b) Contemptible anger then quickly escalates by adding the element of extreme wickedness (“*Raca*” escalates to “*Thou fool!*”; In other words, you’re not just a stupid block head, you’re a vile, wicked, pervert!)(example of road rage).
 - (2) So, the harboring of any anger in our heart, from the rather mild (“*angry without cause*”) to the very severe (“*Thou fool*”) all betray the same heart: one that provides a haven for hateful thoughts and attitudes to smolder and intensify.
 - (3) Any level of such makes us guilty of murder! (Matt. 15:18-20; 1 Jn. 3:15)
- H. **13** Doesn’t mean there is never a time and a place in which a man should be called a “fool.”
- (a) Jesus called people ‘fools’ (Matt. 7:26-27; 23:17; same word, ‘*moros*’ as “*Thou fool*” in 5:22; even stronger than ‘*Raca*’ as it scorns the heart and character, not merely the intellect.)
 - (b) Paul called the Galatians ‘foolish’ (Gal. 3:1).
- I. **14** But, we must be very, very careful that if we ever use such terms that we use them out of love as we seek to startle someone back to the path of right.
- (1) It would do us well to study Proverbs where “fool” (or “fools”) is used 58 times.
 - (2) It would do us well to remember that we should aim our thoughts, attitudes, and comments at the person’s behavior rather than their character (i.e., ******“You’re acting like a fool!” not “You’re a fool!”).
- ****“Anger is lawful only when it burns against sin, and this is equivalent to zeal for the Divine honour.” (Pink, A. W., *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 71)
- J. **15** Jesus starts v. 23 with, “*Therefore,*” further stressing the importance of this point (**Matt. 5:23**: “*Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you...*”).
- (1) It is such a serious matter that we must even interrupt our worship to settle anything that causes such thoughts and attitudes! **Matt. 5:24**: “*First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*”

“...it matters not what he is doing, even if at the sacred altar, he is to stop and get rid of that state of feeling...So important is it that one must get rid of anger, which is the root of murder, that the public worship can wait, must wait, until the state of feeling against a brother has been adjusted.” (Boles, H. L., *The Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 137)
 - (2) Note that the responsibility to initiate reconciliation is on the “innocent” party (v. 23, “*your brother has something against you*”).
 - (3) This is similar to the procedure given in Matt. 18:15ff (i.e., innocent party is to approach the guilty party) and is consistent with Jesus’ call for kingdom citizens to be “peacemakers”! (Matt. 5:9)
 - (4) **16** When “offended,” most sit smugly waiting for the one at fault to take the first step, not so with kingdom citizens! *Kingdom citizens realize souls are at stake and take action!*
 - (5) Verses 25 & 26 offer another good reason why: **Matt 5:25-26**: “*Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge,*

the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. 26 Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny."

******"An illustration from the legal system reinforces vv 23-24. Before a dispute escalates into a court case 'agree with thine adversary quickly'—i.e., reach an out-of-court settlement...To insist that we 'have our day in court' may backfire. The judge can agree with our adversary, find us guilty and turn us over to an officer...who throws us in jail." (K. L. Chumbley, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 99)

- (6) The Lord is emphasizing the seriousness of every breach between brethren and that a failure to reconcile our differences has eternal consequences.

"Early parole is not an option for those convicted of resisting reconciliation." (K. L. Chumbley, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 100)

- (7) **17** Let us always remember and apply **Rom. 12:17-21** and **I Pet. 3:9**: "*not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.*"

******"If a man never becomes angry without a just cause, he will not murder or do violence to his fellow man. Human laws and penalties can only affect a commission of the evil deed. God's law goes behind the deed and removes all ground or occasion of excuse for the evil deed. It removes the ground or occasion for an evil deed in the heart...it removes the spirit that prompts the evil deed...The command to cherish no evil thoughts or angry feelings in the heart, to settle all difficulty and differences with your fellow man quickly and promptly, to return good for evil, comes to man in his quiet and unexcited moments, and he sees that if these directions are followed good will follow evil, and he will conquer difficulties and change enemies into friends..." (Boles, H. L., *The Gospel According to Matthew*, pp. 138-139)

2. **18** Adultery begins in the heart: **Matt. 5:27-30**: "*You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.*"

- A. ****** Our sexual desires are natural, healthy, and God-given (**Gen. 1:28**: "*Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it...*").
- B. But, God limits the satisfaction of those desires to a man and his wife (**Heb. 13:4**: "*Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.*"; **Prov. 5:15-20**: "*Drink water from your own cistern...why should you...be enraptured by an immoral woman...*").
- C. God never intended for us to satisfy our sexual desires outside of marriage:
- (1) Not with another partner (**Heb. 13:4b**: it's the "marriage...bed" that is "undefiled").
 - (2) Or, through sexual fantasy (**Job 31:1**: "*I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman?*"; **Matt. 5:27-30**; BTW: modern technology makes this even more available today, vis-à-vis the internet! **2 Tim. 3:13**).
- D. Adultery has always been repulsive to the Lord:
- (1) Before the Law of Moses, Joseph realized adultery was a sin against both man and God (**Gen. 39:8-9**: "*...How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God.*"; **Gen. 2:24**).
 - (2) The penalty for adultery under the Law of Moses was death (**Lev. 20:10**; **Deut. 22:22**).

- (3) Israel was told to guard against allowing the practice and acceptance of sexual sins “lest the land vomit you out” (Lev. 18:28).
 - (4) The abominable nature of such sins continues in the New Covenant (1 Cor. 6:9 lists four sexual sins that will cause one to “not inherit the kingdom of God”; “fornication,” “adulterers,” “homosexuals,” “sodomites”).
- E. **19** Adultery is wrong and should be avoided for several reasons:
- (1) It shows disregard for God (**Gen. 39:9**: “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”).
 - (2) It is rebellion against His will and wisdom (**Ex. 20:14**: “You shall not commit adultery.”; **Prov. 6:23-29**: “...by means of a harlot a man is reduced to a crust of bread...can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned...?”).
 - (3) It shows disregard for the lawful and the unlawful mate (Gen. 2:24; Prov. 6:26)(Just think of how evil it is to drag someone into your lustful sexual fantasies. What would you think of a person who harbored such thoughts for your wife? One of your children? One of your grandchildren?)
 - (4) It shows disregard for one’s self (**Prov. 6:32-33**: “Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; He who does so destroys his own soul. 33 Wounds and dishonor he will get, and his reproach will not be wiped away.”; pain and heartache of some real examples).
- F. **20** The Pharisees had done to adultery what they had done to murder: They had reduced the law to the mere prohibition of the overt act.
- (1) As long as one had not committed the actual physical act of adultery then he/she was viewed as innocent in their interpretation of the law.
 - (2) Again, only taking the law this far makes almost everyone feel comfortable, for how many folks have actually committed the overt act of adultery?
- G. **21** Just as murder begins in the heart so does adultery (Matt. 15:19).
- (1) Adultery begins with a “look,” in fact, we often call an adulterer one with a “straying eye.”
 - (2) The “look” is not a simple look of appreciation, but a “lustful look.”
 - (3) It is a “look” of intent such that it deliberately awakens forbidden desires that will commit the physical act if circumstances permit.
 **“The lustful heart in this case has decided upon a course of action that the body would execute if the circumstances were favorable.” (John Smith, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 36)
 - (4) ** BTW: Given that adultery begins with a “look,” what does that say of immodest apparel, mixed swimming, dancing, etc.? (Matt. 18:6-7)
- H. Such thoughts are indicative of a heart problem (Matt. 15:19) and the resulting actions are merely expressions of a sin that already took place in one’s mind! (v. 28)
- I. Jesus, the Great Physician, is telling us to treat the root cause of the disease before focusing on the symptoms! (cf. Matt. 12:33; **23:26**: “Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.”)
- J. **22** Instead of “taking two aspirins, and calling tomorrow,” Jesus tells us we are in need of radical surgery! (**vv. 29-30**: “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast

into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.”)

(1) Jesus is using hyperbole, this is not to be taken literally.

- (a) Self-mutilation is pagan (Lev. 19:28; 1 Kgs. 18:28: false prophets of Baal cut themselves!).
- (b) Plus, if I plucked out my right eye, I still could lust with my left eye.
- (c) Even a blind man can engage in sexual fantasies (e.g., Ray Charles had a dozen children by 7 or 8 different women. And, he never had a sexual fantasy?!). The problem is the heart (v. 28).

(2) **23** Jesus' point is this:

- (a) No matter how much you cherish something (even as valuable as an eye or hand), if it causes you to sin you must sacrifice it to maintain your purity.
- (b) Sin is deadly serious no cost is too high to pay if it keeps us from sinning and avoiding the consequences (temporal and eternal) that sin brings.

***“What Jesus seems to be saying is that if your eyes cause you to sin, then don't look. If your foot leads you to sin, don't go. If your hand involves you in sin, then don't touch. The sources of temptation need to be eliminated even if they appear innocent. Avoid the traps...Eternity is more important than time, purity worth more than experience, any sacrifice is worthwhile in this life if it is necessary to ensure entrance into the next.” (John Smith, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 37)

***“To talk about plucking out the right eye ‘shows vividly that there is to be no compromise with evil’ (Morris, 119)” (K. L. Chumbley, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 100)

***“If men and women could be persuaded to weigh with due deliberation the vast importance and endlessness of eternity, and the brevity and uncertainty of this life, they would cease trifling away so many of their swiftly passing hours and prepare to meet their God.” (Pink, A. W., *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 87)

(3) **24** So, here's what we need to do (applies to any sin, not just adultery):

- (a) Don't feed the flesh (**Rom. 6:13**: “And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”; **Rom. 13:14**: “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”).
- (b) Restrain the flesh (1 Cor. 9:27; “discipline”, NKJV; “I keep under”, KJV; from Gr. *hupopiazō*: “to strike under the eye”, hence, to beat the face black and blue (to give a black eye), Vine).
- (c) Run away from sin, not toward it! 1 Cor. 6:18: “Flee fornication!”
- (d) Remember the price paid for our sins (Mk. 15:1-39).
- (e) Mortify the flesh (Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5ff; cf. 1 Cor. 9:24-27).
- (f) Get our “mind set” in the right direction (Col. 3:1-2).
- (g) Fill our minds with the right thoughts (Phil. 4:8ff: “...true...noble...just...pure...lovely...good report...virtue...praiseworthy...”).
- (h) Pray! (Heb. 4:14-16: great high priest that can sympathize with our weaknesses, because He “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin...”).
- (i) Trust God and look for the way of escape! (1 Cor. 10:13)

******“Who is there among us who would not consent to the amputation of a gangrened limb, no matter how painful the operation and heavy the loss, if persuaded that this was imperative in order for life itself to be preserved? Then why refuse painful mortifications which are essential to the saving of the soul?” (Pink, A. W., *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 87)

III. CONCLUSION: 25

1. Lord willing, next time we'll consider more Jesus says about the righteousness of the kingdom.
2. In the introduction I said Jesus' teaching here would:
 - A. Help those with good and honest hearts to see themselves as God sees them. Are you beginning to see some things about yourself that God sees?
 “If that does not make a person squirm, then he probably is not understanding what he is reading.” (John Smith, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 34)
 - B. **26** Should challenge us to the very core of our being and permeate how we view every aspect of our lives; every thought as well as every action. Do you feel challenged?
 - C. **27** And, after we come to an understanding of the righteousness Jesus requires of kingdom citizens it should forever put to rest in our minds the notion that one must show us “proof texts” specifically forbidding such things as social drinking, smoking, dancing, mixed swimming, immodest dress, etc.
******“In what has just been before us we may see a very real warning against *slavish literalism*, which has ever been the refuge into which not a few errorists have betaken themselves.” (Pink, A. W., *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 81)
3. **28** Are you getting Jesus' point? (Eccl. 12:13-14; **Matt. 22:37**: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”; **Isa. 66:2**: “But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.”).
4. Remember **Heb. 4:12-13**: “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”
5. Invitation (Matt. 11:28-30)

IV. REFERENCES:

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