



Lesson 6 – A Higher Standard

Matthew 5:27-36

This lesson will cover lust, divorce, and taking oaths, so it ought to get quite interesting! Remember, the Sermon on the Mount is the Messiah’s view of the law! His message is a surprising one – the most religious of the day had missed it badly when it came to following God’s law. This means what Christ expected of those who would inherit the kingdom was much higher than what scribes and Pharisees had to offer.

Although the first and secondary topics of adultery and divorce clearly belong together, all three of these issues confront the wrong thinking of those who justified themselves before men but stood guilty before God. What Christ holds up is the kind of behavior we would expect from someone who is living a salt and light life characterized by the beatitudes. And they are all very different from the way the world around us thinks, even many who claim the name of Christ.

How is the situation that we address today in America like the situation Jesus addressed? How is it different? _____

We will spend just a few minutes on each of these topics, meditating on how our lives should reflect Christ's new standard here given.

A New Standard on Adultery

Once again, the commands here sink deeper than the level of our actions. God is not merely concerned with what you do, he cares about who you are. Whereas many will focus on not doing wrong actions, Christ takes things to a new level when he says that we should not have wrong desires, either.

Both Christ's command on murder/anger and his command on adultery/lust raise a challenge for believers. What do we do when unwanted desires and emotions arise? Do we ask God to forgive us of them? Should we feel guilty? When does a temptation becomes a sin? Many Christians have felt crushed by their fleshly impulses.

What would your response be to someone who was struggling with feeling guilty over emotions and desires he or she didn't think they could help? What Scriptures would you point them to? _____

Christ's statement at the end of this discussion is quite radical. If you're hand or your eye or any other part of you keeps leading you into sin, cut it off and throw it away!

Nobody that I know has dismembered any part of themselves in obedience to this verse, for which I'm glad! So how then do we understand what Jesus means here? _____

A New Standard on Divorce

Christ's teachings concerning divorce are one of the most explosive and hotly debated issues in the study of the Bible. This is true for two reasons: 1) a compelling case could be made for different explanations of the details and 2) this is not some esoteric idea that only ever touches scholars in ivory towers. "Can I get a divorce?" is sadly a question that pastors and godly family members will likely at some point hear.

However, we are not going to answer all those questions. We're going to take a step back from the fiery debate of "Is all divorce and remarriage bad or only some?" and ask what it is everyone can agree on that Christ is teaching here. Whatever your interpretation of this passage, it's clear that Christ's teaching is considered radical by those around him (cf Matthew 19:1-10).

Christ confronts the all too casual view of divorce that was prominent among some of the Jews of his day. In fact, a whole school of Judaism interpreted the Old Testament as allowing

divorce for essentially any reason. Marriage was easy to get out of, but for Jesus' followers divorce was the last option and only for extreme circumstances (if Jesus even allowed it at all).

What is the typical view on divorce in the world today? How does Jesus view sound to that kind of world? _____

For singles, what does Christ's teaching here have to do with your life? What general principles is Christ teaching here that could be applied more broadly? What kind of a person is Jesus looking for? _____

A New Standard on Honesty

Finally, Jesus confronts wrong thinking on taking oaths. When we read "swear" or "curse" in the Bible, we run the danger of thinking that Jesus is talking about four letter words and words that show up on a Vidangel filters. But he's actually talking about taking an oath. We don't often do this today, but you will still occasionally hear or even say, "That's the truth. I swear!"

What two reasons does Jesus give for not taking oaths? _____

How can we apply this teaching today in a society where people don't regularly take oaths? _____

What do these three topics have in common? How would this type of person be different from that average unbeliever? _____