



Scotts Hill Baptist Church

SUMMER ON THE MOUNT • FUNCTIONAL PHARISEES AND KINGDOM CITIZENS •
MATTHEW 5:31-48 • 6/25/2023

MAIN POINT

We don't look for loopholes, we follow kingdom principles. Followers of Jesus respond to wrongs against them with love and grace rather than vengeance.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Think back to when you were younger. What was your greatest "success" in finding a loophole?

Has anybody ever used a loophole against you? How did you react and how did that make you feel?

In what area of your life now are you most tempted to find a loophole and what area are you most faithful in carrying out the intent of the law?

Jesus taught a radically different way of relating to other people and living in true righteousness. We are not to be like the functional pharisees who tried to find loopholes in all of God's instructions. Instead, we should strive to be faithful followers and citizens of God's Kingdom that model the appropriate way to act in our relationships with our spouses, friends, and even enemies.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 5:31-32.

What can we learn from these verses?

Unfortunately, marriage—like sex and lust from last week—has fallen under the shadow of sin. God intended the marriage covenant to be a reflection of the covenant He makes with His own people. Because of sin, however, marriages have failed to live up to God's standard.

Jesus called us back to the sacred nature of marriage. God loves and values marriage highly as a covenant relationship.

Whom do you look to as a model of faithfulness?

What steps can you take to resist temptation and to cling to faithfulness within your marriage?

How do we love God and love others in a culture of divorce?

In this passage, Jesus is encouraging us to hold onto marriage. When done God's way—with selflessness, faithfulness, and trust—marriage can be one of His biggest blessings.

St. Augustine once said, "It is human to err. It is devilish to remain willfully in error." How does this quote align with what we have learned from Jesus' words in Matthew 5:27-32?

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 5:33-37.

The original laws regarding oaths are found in Leviticus 19:12, Numbers 30:2, and Deuteronomy 23:21. What was the main point of these laws?

How did Jesus' interpretation differ from the Pharisees'?

The main point of these laws was to prohibit false swearing. When the Israelites vowed in God's name, they were to take special care to not break their word. If a person invoked God's name in oaths to the Lord, then God's character was associated with that person's promise to keep the oaths. God meant for His people to be known as always telling the truth so transparently that they wouldn't need to take an oath at all. Jesus' elevation of honesty (coming from a pure heart) was intended to make oaths unnecessary in the day-to-day life of His followers. The presence of an oath gives life to the lies it intends to prevent. Letting our yes be yes does not give life to a lie.

What is the heart of the matter regarding oaths? Why is keeping promises important?

What stands out to you about Jesus' specific examples of swearing in verses 34-36?

What do we communicate to other people when we fail to keep our word?

What do we communicate to God?

In verses 34-36, Jesus noted four examples of things people in His day swore by. They did so in order to make an oath less binding than if they swore by God. But Jesus showed that it was no trivial matter to swear even by these four things. All are directly connected to God in His greatness and majesty. Although Moses' law permitted oaths, it did not command them. For followers of Jesus, oaths should be unnecessary. We show respect for God, others, and ourselves when we practice straightforward, simple honesty. God Himself is our model for promise keeping.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 5:38-42.

What was the original meaning of "eye for eye" and "tooth for tooth" (Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:17-20)? How was this law being twisted by the religious teachers of Jesus' day?

The command about revenge is in Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; and Deuteronomy 19:21. Without a law like this, the loss of, say, one tooth, could lead to the revenge of knocking out two teeth, which could then escalate the conflict. The command was to make payback proportional to the damage caused. In its Old Testament form, this law kept legal judgments from being over the top.

How did Jesus' interpretation of this law differ from the Pharisees? How did this raise expectations for His followers?

What stands out to you about the four examples Jesus gave His followers in verses 39-42? How do these apply to our lives today?

What qualities can replace our desire for revenge when it surfaces?

In the first century, this law was an excuse for taking personal revenge. Some religious teachers—forgetting the principle of mercy—thought equal payback was always required. Jesus, however, taught a better way for His followers. Those whose hearts He has cleansed have no need to fight back. They don't need to get even. They can give up the right to vengeance, believing that ultimately the Lord will judge all evil. When God's people refuse to retaliate, they show they trust God to judge all things fairly in the end. In verses

39-42, Jesus offered four examples of what it means not to fight back when evil is done. In each instance, the natural tendency to fight back is overcome by a heart changed by Christ.

How did Jesus' life display His teaching to go beyond the call of duty?

What do we communicate to God and others when we take Jesus' command in this passage seriously?

Because we have experienced the love of Christ, Jesus' followers will act with greater kindness and more love than the law requires. Love requires us to resist the tendency to retaliate and instead to work for the good of those seeking to hurt us. Think about ways you could serve others by self-sacrifice. Remember the truth that giving up your rights, possessions, and time shows respect both for God and for others.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 5:43-48.

Jesus quoted a Scripture His audience knew: "You shall love your neighbor." Here Jesus included an additional part of the saying people knew but was not found in Scripture. The command to hate your enemy was a twisted corollary of the command to love one's neighbors. Yet because we find it easy to hate our enemies, we can understand why religious people of Jesus' day thought it was the right thing to do.

What was the main point of the law to love your neighbor and hate your enemy? How did Jesus' teaching differ from the Pharisees'? How did this change what His followers expected?

Have someone read Romans 12:17-21. How does God's command in these verses compare with His command in Matthew 5:43-44?

How did Jesus' life demonstrate this teaching?

Jesus' understanding of the command to love your neighbor was to put no limits on who our neighbors are. Neighbors include even our enemies and persecutors. Our Lord Himself is the ultimate model of this. While on the cross, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). He set the ultimate example for us when He showed love to His enemies by forgiving those who crucified Him.

Why is it so hard for us to love our "enemies"?

Read verse 48 again. What does it say about God that He demands perfection from us, and yet when we can't achieve that, He fulfills His own requirements in our place?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What do today's passages reveal about the ways our actions extend beyond ourselves and affect others?

What are some practical things that help us keep honesty as a priority in our lives?

Which of the qualities we've discussed today do you want to grow most right now? How would your life be different as God helps you to put this quality into action?

How does the gospel help you follow Jesus' command to react with grace?

PRAYER

Close in prayer, asking God for the Spirit's power to count your enemies as worthy of your own life for Jesus's sake.

COMMENTARY

| MATTHEW 5:31-48

5:31-32 Jesus challenged a loose rabbinic paraphrase of Dt 24:1 that distorted the original meaning of the text. In the hands of the rabbis, Dt 24:1 greatly multiplied the number of offenses that could justify divorce. For instance, rabbinic commentaries on Dt 24 cited minor complaints such as a wife's fading beauty or her tendency to burn food as legitimate grounds for divorce. However, Jesus kept true to Dt 24:1 and insisted that sexual immorality is the legitimate grounds for divorce. People who divorce for frivolous reasons and remarry are guilty of adultery since their original marriage covenant has not been genuinely dissolved.

5:33-37 Oaths to the Lord (i.e., "I swear to God") were considered binding, but since Jews avoided use of God's personal name and instead used reverent substitutions, clever liars

could take an oath that seemed to appeal to God without technically doing so (23:16-22). Jesus taught that swearing oaths is wrong since oaths call for the destruction of an object or person if the oath is broken. Thus, swearing by heaven... earth... Jerusalem, or even one's own head is inappropriate because it implies that we have the authority to destroy things over which God alone has authority. Swearing against God or His belongings aligns us with the evil one who attempted to assume God's position as Ruler of the universe.

5:38-48 As many do today, the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day must have taken the "eye for an eye" passages (Exod. 21:24; Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:21) as a reason for hurting others at least as badly as they had been hurt. The law was not given to call for revenge, but to bring justice. Breaking the law has consequences, but these passages have often been wrongly taken as a guide for fighting back. What Jesus clarified was that they were always intended as a maximum for retaliation, and that mercy was always acceptable.

For the Christ follower, "letting the punishment fit the crime" falls short. We must actually consider blessing the one who has done wrong. Mercy (withholding deserved punishment) and grace (giving undeserved gifts) are the right conduct.

The one mile (5:41) refers to the practice of the Roman soldiers requiring people to carry their burden for one mile. By Roman law, the soldier could require no more than one mile of a single person, but Jesus' kingdom servants (in representing the gracious spirit of their king) are to go beyond what is required of them.

The first part of Jesus' quote in 5:43, "Love your neighbor," is one of the central commands of the Bible (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:34-40). But mistaken thinking came with the second portion: "and hate your enemy." Here again, the human desire is revenge, which might seem logical, flowing out of the first statement. But the reality is that "hate your enemy" is far removed from God's intended meaning in "love your neighbor." In the parallel passage in Luke (10:25-37), Jesus explained through the parable of the good Samaritan that every human we have contact with is our neighbor. Therefore, by definition, Christians are to love everyone and hate no one.

Jesus used a different approach to make the same point. He emphasized two principles to urge His followers to love all people. First, He urged them to follow the example of their Father in heaven. The Father gives gifts (sun and rain) to good and evil alike, and so we, as believers, ought to love and pray for our enemies (Luke 23:34; Rom. 5:8). By this we will show ourselves "sons of your Father in heaven." He teaches us to love everyone because God does.

The ultimate expression of this pattern is the command to imitate the Father in 5:48, Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Jesus used *teleios*, a Greek word that means “having reached its end, mature, complete, perfect.” The goal for the kingdom servant is to behave like his Father, and so to reach the mature level of transformation.

Second, Jesus urges us to show ourselves to be different from the rest of the world. This is actually the flip side of the first argument, to be like the Father. If we show partiality and if we love only those who love us, we are like unbelievers. If, on the other hand, we show love to all, guided by grace and mercy, then we show ourselves to be different, and we shine before the world (5:14-16), bringing glory to the Father. All six examples are strong, but this one in particular stands out as showing mercy and grace, the supernatural qualities of God’s people.