

Jesus Continues to Explain God's Standards of Holiness Matthew 5:31-48

by David Servant

Jesus teaches that God's standard of holiness is perfection, and we should strive to live according to that standard by being merciful, not revengeful, and showing love to all people, including our enemies.

Scripture: Matthew 5:31-43, Luke 6:27, Romans 12:20

Topics: "Gods Holiness", "Christian Ethics"

Description

David Servant preaches on Jesus' sermon on the mountainside, explaining the difference between God's standard of holiness and the misinterpretations of the religious teachers of His day. Jesus addresses the topics of divorce, making vows, revenge, and loving one's enemies, emphasizing the importance of following God's higher standard of truth, mercy, and love towards all, even those who wrong us.

Transcript

During His sermon on the mountainside, Jesus continued to explain the difference between God's standard of holiness and the Pharisees' and religious teachers' standard of holiness. Today the first subject in our reading is divorce. Many of the religious teachers of Jesus' day misinterpreted, for their own convenience, what Moses had said about divorce. The Law of Moses made provision for divorce only in cases when adultery had been committed. However, the divorce had to be done legally, and it was required that an official divorce certificate be given by the husband to his wife. Many of the religious teachers, however, twisted what the Law actually said, teaching that a man could divorce his wife for any reason, as long as he gave his wife a certificate. As a result, men were divorcing their wives for reasons other than adultery and thinking that they were OK in God's eyes.

Jesus, however, said they were very guilty before God. In fact, they were triply guilty, because they were not only responsible for their own sin of divorcing their wives, but they were held accountable by God for the "adultery" of their divorced wives (who often had to remarry to survive) and the "adultery" of the men whom their divorced wives married! (I've put quotation marks around the word adultery because it was adultery only because the first man had no right to divorce his wife. Thus it was equivalent to his forcing her to have a sexual relationship with another man while he was still married to her.)

Next in His sermon on God's standards of holiness was the subject of making vows, something else the Law of Moses spoke about which had been conveniently altered by the religious teachers of the day. They

taught that if a person swore by the temple, the altar, or by heaven, he was not obligated to keep his vow, but if he swore by the gold of the temple, the offering on the altar, or God in heaven, he was obligated (see Matthew 23:16-22). Apparently there were other items by which a person could vow and not be obligated as well, such as the earth, Jerusalem and his own head (see Matthew 5:35-36). In short, the religious teachers had devised a way by which they could lie, supposedly without being guilty of sin.

Jesus said that God's standard is much higher than that. People should say what they mean and mean what they say. When someone says, "I swear to God that I'm telling the truth," he's admitting that he's usually a liar. Jesus said His followers should have no need to swear or make vows because they should always tell the truth. Their "yes" and "no" should be trustworthier than anyone else's most convincing vow.

Next was the subject of revenge. The Law of Moses said that when a person is found guilty in court of injuring another person, his punishment should be equivalent to the harm he caused. If he knocked out someone's tooth, in fairness and justice, his tooth should be knocked out. This was a commandment to insure that justice would be served in court cases.

However, once again, the religious teachers had twisted this scripture, making it into a commandment for getting personal revenge, something God's Word forbids (see Deuteronomy 32:35). Obtaining due justice in court is one thing, but getting revenge is another. Additionally, the religious leaders of Jesus' day had conveniently overlooked the fact that the Old Testament taught they should show kindness to their enemies (see Exodus 23:4-5; Proverbs 25:21-22). That was God's standard of holiness, and Jesus endorsed it further by telling us to turn the other cheek and go the extra mile when we are dealing with evil people. God wants us to be merciful, not revengeful, when we are wronged.

Finally, we read one more God-given commandment that the religious teachers of Jesus' day had changed to accommodate their hateful hearts. In the Old Testament, God had said, "Love your neighbor," but the religious teachers had conveniently assumed that if God wanted them to love their neighbors, then He must have meant for them to hate their enemies. But, according to Jesus, that is not at all what God meant! Jesus would later teach in the story of the Good Samaritan that we should consider every person to be our neighbor. God wants us to love everyone, which includes our enemies. That is God's standard for His children, a standard to which He Himself lives. He sends crop-growing sun and rain not only on good people, but also on evil people. We should follow His example, showing kindness to undeserving people. As Jesus said, if we only love people who love us, we are doing no more than wicked unbelievers. God's standard of holiness is perfection, and that is what we should be striving for in our lives.

Q. When Jesus commanded us to turn the other cheek and go the second mile when dealing with evil people, does that mean He wants us to allow people to take advantage of us, allowing them to ruin our lives if they desire?

A. No. Notice that Jesus did not say that we should kill ourselves when someone slaps us on the cheek, give someone our house and furniture when they sue us for our shirt, or walk a thousand miles with a soldier who demands that we carry his gear for a mile. Jesus was simply telling us to be merciful, not revengeful, when dealing with selfish, evil people.

Q. Under Roman law, a Roman soldier could demand that any person carry his gear for one mile, and the Roman soldiers took advantage of that law whenever they could. What did that reveal about the average Roman soldier? What kind of effect do you think it had on a soldier when he forced a Christian to carry his gear, and that Christian gladly accepted and then carried his gear two miles?

Application: Too often, Christians are known for their snobbery or their doctrine. God wants us to be known for our love and servanthood. What do unbelievers think of when they think of you?

Source:

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