

The Law of God and Your Word

by Dick Woodward

Dick Woodward's sermon emphasizes the importance of integrity in our words and the application of God's law through love rather than legalism.

Duration: 22:08

Scripture: Matthew 5:17-20, Matthew 5:31-37

Topics: "Law Of God"

Description

In this lesson from the Mini Bible College, the teacher focuses on the importance of our words and how we should communicate our commitment to God and others. The teacher references the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, specifically addressing the topic of swearing falsely. He emphasizes that we should not swear at all, using examples such as heaven, earth, and Jerusalem. The teacher encourages believers to be committed and available to be used by God, growing closer to Him. He concludes by explaining that the response to this teaching should not be fear of losing everything, but rather a willingness to be different and show others a different way, even if it means not resisting evil and turning the other cheek.

Transcript

Hello, and welcome to another lesson in the Mini-Bible College, as we study the teachings of Jesus Christ called the Sermon on the Mount. Today, our teacher will help us understand how important our words are, and how we should communicate our commitment to God and to others. Now here is our teacher with today's practical lesson from God's Word.

Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord. But I say to you, do not swear at all, neither by heaven, for it is God's throne, nor by the earth, for it is His footstool, nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.

But let your yes be yes, and your no be no, for whatever is more than these is from the evil one. I have read Matthew 5, verses 33-37, where we continue to hear Jesus illustrate and apply His philosophy of Scripture or His approach to the law of God. Remember, back in verses 17-20, Jesus told His disciples there on the mountaintop that what He is teaching them is going to agree with Scripture.

It will fulfill Scripture, it will get to the spirit of the Scripture. But what He is teaching them is not going to agree with what the scribes and the Pharisees have been teaching them. Having made that statement in that paragraph, verses 17-20, now in paragraph after paragraph, which begin with the words, You have heard that it has been said, but I say unto you, Jesus is illustrating, He is applying that statement He made about His approach to the And of course, He is saying to the disciples that He is teaching at the first Christian retreat.

You see all those people down there? If you're going to be part of my solution and part of my answer to all the problems those people have, you need to understand this approach to Scripture. You need to know how to pass the law of God through the prism of the love of God, before you apply the law of God to the lives of people. Do not go down there and hit them over the head with God's word as the scribes and Pharisees do, because the letter of the law kills.

You can destroy people. You can devastate people with the Bible if you beat them with the Bible. You need to get the spirit of the law yourself, apply it to your own life, and then use the spirit of the law approach as you use the Scripture in the lives of other people.

Having made that point in verses 17-20, six paragraphs then follow in which Jesus will elaborate upon that statement, illustrate it, and apply it. What he teaches in these paragraphs is not to be considered an exhaustive treatment of the subjects he deals with. Remember he is drawing up one illustration after another to make his point and to illustrate and apply it.

He has told these people on the mountaintop, which I believe were all men, how to apply the Scripture in relationship to their own lives. In the Beatitudes, he told them to look inward, and now he is telling them to look around and to apply the Beatitudes in their relationships. Many scholars feel that the Sermon on the Mount is really the Beatitudes.

That is, the Beatitudes are the sermon and all the rest is application. Well, certainly in chapter 5 the Beatitudes are the teaching, and all the rest of the chapter is application. He is showing these men who have looked inward how to look around and apply the Beatitudes in their relationships, for instance, to their brother, to their adversary, to women, and to their wives.

We looked at the paragraph where Jesus mentioned their wives. He mentioned divorce and the law of God regarding divorce. I think it's significant that the paragraph preceding had to do with adultery and with relating to the opposite sex the way they should.

Someone has said the best defense is a good offense, and the Scripture says that, especially in the book of Proverbs. The best defense against the sin of adultery is to have a very good marriage. That's true of a wife, and that's true of a husband.

There is far too much temptation out there today, and the best defense you have against that temptation, in addition, of course, to the power of the Holy Spirit to keep you from sin, is to have a good marriage, a good physical marriage, because your vulnerability decreases dramatically if your need is already met when you circulate among people, especially people who would love to commit adultery with you if you would commit adultery with them. In the paragraph we just read, verses 33 through 37, Jesus is again teaching something that the scribes and the Pharisees did teach, but he would strongly disagree with their interpretation. Sometimes, in these paragraphs, you will discover that Jesus will say, it has been said to you.

For example, do not commit adultery. That command is found in the Scripture. It's the seventh commandment.

That's found in Exodus chapter 20, verse 14. When he talks about divorce, that's in Deuteronomy 24.1. That was in the Scripture. But now when Jesus talks about taking an oath, notice that there's no reference.

Remember the scribes and the Pharisees and their teaching went far beyond the Scripture. They taught what was called tradition. Jesus referred to it in Mark chapter 7 and Matthew chapter 15 as the tradition of the elders, which they put right next to the Scripture and probably valued as highly as the Scripture.

Perhaps they valued it even more highly than the Scripture because they had composed it themselves. This seems to be one of those traditional things he is referring to. Apparently, they had a custom.

They taught that you never break an oath that you made to the Lord. But when you get into the tradition of the scribes and the Pharisees here, you will see something really quite amazing. They had a system about oath-taking or swearing.

I swear by the temple, they would say, or I swear by the gold of the temple. Or I swear by the altar, or I swear by the sacrifice on the altar. They would swear by heaven or they would swear by the earth or by Jerusalem.

Apparently, this was their tradition. But it was a very complicated system. The people in the inner circle knew that if you swore by a certain thing, let's say the temple, for example, then your oath was binding.

But if you swore by the gold of the temple, it was not binding. Or if you swore by the altar, it was binding. But if you swore by the sacrifice on the altar, it was not or vice versa.

It was a very complicated system and only those who were in the inner circle really knew which of these oaths were binding and which were not. Some innocent soul who did not understand this complicated oath system might think they were entering into an agreement and because the other people would swear by their head or swear by Jerusalem, they would think it was a binding oath. But then they would find out that when the other person did not keep the oath, that it was not binding because of the basis upon which the other person took the oath.

It was a very complicated system and really it was a false system. What Jesus was doing here was saying that they completely missed the whole spirit of the law on this matter of oath taking. There was a commandment, thou shalt not bear false witness.

Now that was a commandment of God and that did not say that they were never supposed to tell a big lie as compared to a little lie. We have all kinds of lies, you know, small lies, big lies, but really the commandment does not say thou shalt not lie. The commandment says do not bear false witness.

Do not create a false impression. It does not matter how you do it. If you create a false impression or bear a false witness, you have broken the spirit of that commandment.

You see the commandment thou shalt not lie really has to do with a person's integrity. That is the spirit of the law. That is at the heart of this matter.

But they had gone very far from the spirit of the law into the letter of the law and they were actually bearing false witness with this complicated oath taking system. Jesus cuts through all of that and says let your yes

be yes and your no be no. Anything beyond that comes from the evil one.

Anything beyond that is departing from the spirit of the commandment that says thou shalt not bear false witness. We need to realize this today that one of the most clever ways to bear false witness is to tell the truth but to tell only part of the truth or to tell the truth out of context. People in the media are experts at this.

By telling the truth out of context, by telling part of the truth, oh how easy it is to bear false witness. The spirit of the commandment says that people ought to be able to trust your integrity. When you say yes, they know you mean yes.

When you say no, they know you mean no. Anything else is coming from the evil one because it is getting away from the spirit of the commandment that says do not bear false witness. Many years ago when I was a youth pastor, I had been given a car to drive.

My father had been too poor to own a car so I had grown up without a car to drive. When I became the youth pastor of one particular church, just after I graduated from college, the people of the church furnished me with a car. I had not yet learned to control my speed.

I had taken driver's training in school but I had no real experience at driving. I kept getting speeding tickets because I had not learned to control my speed. I remembered that on one occasion when I had a group of young people in the car with me, a policeman stopped me.

He was driving an unmarked car and we were out in the country. I had no idea that the sound of the siren he was blowing was coming from his car. I was passing a factory and I thought the sound was the noonday whistle at the factory.

When the policeman finally got my attention and stopped me, he told me how many laws I had broken during the time that he had been following me. He was very angry. He took my driver's license back to his car with him to write up a traffic summons.

He was back there in his car for a very long time. Then when he came up to my car again, he handed me back my license without a traffic summons and he said, You have to admit you are really breaking the law but I'm going to let you go and it's only for one reason and that is I know your dad. When he looked at my driver's license, apparently he thought he knew my father.

My father didn't own a car, as I said. He had never even been in that locality. He was from another area entirely.

I found out later that he was a high-ranking official in the local government there with the same name as my father. And that police officer thought the official was my father. He said, Your father is a great man.

Now what am I to do with a situation like that? I had not thought it through and so all I said in response to him was, My father is a great man. Now that was a statement of truth because my father was a great man. He was a godly man.

He was a believer. And all I did was simply agree with the officer and make a true statement about my dad. Some of the young people in the car were about to break out laughing because they realized that the police officer thought that he knew my dad.

Do you understand what I'm illustrating? Is it possible to break the commandment, Thou shalt not bear false witness by making a true statement? Is it possible in a situation like the one in which I found myself that day to break that commandment by saying nothing at all? As I thought about it later, I realized that I had not given the policeman that false impression. I simply had not corrected his false impression. I was a lot younger then and newer in my faith than I am now.

I don't think I would handle it the same way now as I did then. Do you see what I'm illustrating? The spirit of this law at the heart of this paragraph, verses 33 through 37, is one of the Ten Commandments, Thou shalt not bear false witness. Based upon that commandment, the scribes and the Pharisees had invented an entire body of little rules and regulations that spelled out the application of that commandment.

But according to Jesus, they were only trying to find ways to bear false witness and yet to feel like they were still religious. If there is scripture involved here, Jesus is saying to the disciples on the mountaintop, I do not agree with the way they interpret and apply the scripture. If it was tradition, well, he was brushing that aside by saying, I do not agree with their tradition and the little commandments they have invented in addition to the law of God.

The same thing is true in the next paragraph. Verse 38 says, You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other cheek to him also.

If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him too. Give to him who asks, and from him who wants to borrow from you, do not turn away.

Now we are getting into the really difficult paragraphs of Matthew chapter 5. This one and the next one are considered two of the most difficult passages of scripture in the entire New Testament. In order to understand these paragraphs, let us again be reminded of what Jesus is doing here. He is illustrating the statement he made in verses 17 through 20 that his approach to scripture was not the same as the approach taken by the religious leaders.

The religious leaders had been teaching, of course, this was biblical and is found in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I believe Jesus is saying here, I don't agree with the spirit in which they are teaching, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Again we should go back to the beginning and ask, what was on the heart of God when God inspired Moses to write these commandments? What was the purpose of the marriage? That is called the spirit of the law.

Jesus is really great about going back to the beginning and asking, what was the purpose of it all? And are you applying the law in a way that is consistent with the purpose of God and that underlining principle of God? When you go back to where the law was given in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, as with the divorce law, God was trying to curb the natural desire of the people of God for revenge. He was putting a limit upon them. If someone knocked out their tooth, their attitude was, I'm going to break their neck.

If somebody gouged out their eye, their attitude was, I'm going to take their life. It is only natural in an unregenerated man for the person to feel the need for vengeance. That is not justice, for justice would have been an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

But people, if they lose an eye or a tooth, do not only want justice, they want vengeance. And this also has to do with lawsuits. Today when you look at some of these lawsuits, it becomes clear that people don't want justice.

They go far beyond justice in some of these lawsuits that we hear about today. Here Jesus again is talking about the spirit of the law of God. Before you apply the law of God to your own life or the lives of others, pass the law of God through the prism of the love of God, through the prism of the purpose of God, through the prism of the principle God had in mind when he gave this law.

And what do you find? God was curbing the desire of people for vengeance when he said, if you lose a tooth, all you get is a tooth in return. And you have to stop there because that's justice, a tooth for a tooth. If you lose an eye, all you get is an eye.

Now Jesus is going beyond that, far beyond that, when he says, but I tell you, do not resist an evil person. Someone has said, life is like a dogfight out there. It's really a bad situation.

It's like, as they say, a dogfight, meaning it's very hectic and stressful. And maybe what Jesus is saying here is, listen, you are not dogs. Are you out there fighting other dogs because you think you are a dog too? What Jesus is going to get at in the next paragraph is this great question.

What are you doing more than others? When he talks about loving even the enemy, he puts it this way. What do you do more than others? Look down the hill. See all those people down there? All right.

Life is like a dogfight. Now when you go down there, in what way are you going to be different? Are you going to live in such a way that you're going to show those people it can be another way? It does not have to be the way it is. It does not have to be a dogfight.

You have got to be different. As the salt in order to preserve the meat from corrupting has to be different from the meat, you've got to be different too. And so what you need to do is show those people down there that there is a different way.

There is another way. There is a right way. And how do you illustrate the right way? How do you teach that? You don't resist the evil person.

You turn the other cheek. If they sue you, let them not only take your inner coat, but your outer coat as well. In those days, the conquering Roman soldiers could force Jewish citizens to carry their packs for about two kilometers.

And when a Jewish person was asked to do that, they could not do anything but comply. They had to do it. But they could have a terrible attitude while complying.

Jesus is saying if they force you to go two kilometers, then you go four. And when someone wants something from you, give it to them and do not turn away the person who wants to borrow from you. What is Jesus teaching here? Now remember this, if you understand the Beatitudes such as blessed are the poor in spirit, remember that can be translated blessed are the broken in spirit, all of this teaching was given to the disciple.

And what was a disciple? Well, according to Luke chapter 14, a disciple was one who was willing to put Jesus first ahead of his own life. He was willing to take up his cross and follow Jesus, meaning that he was

willing to die for Jesus. He was willing to put Jesus first ahead of all the other people in his life, father, mother, husband, wife, even children.

And a disciple was willing to put Jesus first ahead of every possession he had in life. Jesus said in Luke chapter 14, verses 33, whosoever he be of you that does not forsake all that he has, he cannot be my disciple. If a person had come to this first Christian retreat, having made that kind of a commitment to Christ, I am willing to take up my cross and follow you.

I'm willing to die for you. Well, here in this teaching, Jesus was simply showing that person where he wanted them to die and why he wanted them to die and how he wanted them to die. One of the things that is very important for us to understand in these last two paragraphs of Matthew chapter five is simply this.

If you have already made that commitment to Jesus, if you have decided that you are willing to die for him, then the first response to this teaching should not be, well, if I did that, they would take everything I have, or I might even lose my life. The answer most people have when they hear this, the response of most people to this kind of teaching, resist not evil, they would say, well, if we don't resist evil, we could lose everything. Remember this, the chief end of man is to glorify God.

Some say that the first principle of civilization is self-preservation. The world's attitude is that you have a right to preserve and to protect and hold on to your own life and everything that you have. But that's not the basic principle of coming to Christ.

The Westminster Catechism of 1647 says the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. In paragraphs like these, is it possible that Jesus is telling us how, when, where, and in what way we are to glorify God? I think it's important also to realize that Jesus was not addressing governments here. Jesus was not addressing the order of things in terms of society.

He was teaching disciples how to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, part of his solution, part of his answer to all the problems of this world. Think of that when you come to a paragraph like resist not evil. In my opinion, this does not mean that wicked people in society are not to be resisted.

There are many scriptures that teach that government and law come from God, and there is such a thing as a law enforcement officer who is going to express the present wrath of God upon the evildoer because authority does not bear the sword in vain. God put that sword or gun in his hand. When you put other scriptures together, Jesus is not saying that evil is not to be resisted in the whole world or in society, but only in the heart of the disciple.

Jesus is saying to his disciples, if you want to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, then you have to come to the scripture the way I do, and you should look at the scripture in terms of the spirit of the law the way I do. Ask yourself as you come to these difficult paragraphs in Matthew chapter five, have I made that kind of commitment to Jesus Christ? Am I worthy of being called a disciple of Jesus Christ? Am I willing to take up my cross and die for him? Have I really put myself on the cross, and has myself been crucified with Christ? When those things are in place, and only those things are in place, can you understand a paragraph like the one we have been considering in this study? God bless you until next time. We trust that you are growing in your faith and are being filled with our Lord's hope and encouragement to be the disciple he has called you to be.

Our prayer is that you will be more committed and more available to be used by God as you grow closer to him. Now until we meet next time, may you have the attitude of Christ and be people of his word and people of your word.

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