



In Matthew 5:17-37, Jesus emphasizes that He hasn't come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them. He then expands on specific commandments, deepening their implications: anger is equated with murder, lust with adultery, and divorce is restricted to cases of sexual immorality. He also condemns oaths, urging people to be honest without swearing. Through these teachings, Jesus calls for a deeper, more heartfelt commitment to God's Word, focusing on our purity and integrity.

**Key Passage:** Matthew 5:17-37

**Discussion Questions:**

1. In verse 20, Jesus states that our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. What does this mean? How might this challenge our perceptions of religion and morality? How are we tempted toward superficial religiosity?

Jesus challenges His followers to achieve a righteousness that surpasses the scribes and Pharisees by focusing on internal sincerity rather than external compliance. While the scribes and Pharisees were known for their strict, public adherence to religious laws, Jesus calls for a deeper, more authentic commitment to God. This teaching shifts the emphasis from outward actions and ritualistic observance to genuine moral integrity and heartfelt devotion, critiquing superficial religiosity and advocating for a sincere, transformative faith that aligns actions with a pure heart and actual ethical behavior.

2. In verses 21-22, Jesus equates anger with murder. How does this shift the focus from actions to attitudes? Why is addressing internal attitudes necessary for changing external behavior? What does it look like to surrender anger, hatred, and contempt to Jesus?

Jesus equates anger with murder to shift the focus from actions to attitudes, underscoring that the root of sinful behavior lies in one's heart. By teaching that harboring anger or contempt towards others is akin to committing murder, Jesus highlights the significance of internal attitudes in shaping external behavior. Addressing these internal attitudes is crucial because they are the source of actions; a heart filled with anger, hatred, or contempt is likely to manifest in harmful behaviors. By promoting internal purity and the transformation of one's heart, Jesus emphasizes that true righteousness arises from a heart surrendered to God.

3. In verses 23-24, Jesus emphasizes the importance of reconciliation. How does this teaching prioritize relationships over religious rituals? What practical steps can we take to reconcile with others?

In these verses, Jesus prioritizes reconciliation over religious rituals by teaching that if someone remembers a grievance while offering a gift at the altar, they should reconcile with their brother or

sister before completing their offering. Jesus emphasizes that true worship is intertwined with loving and peaceful relationships. Practical steps for reconciliation include initiating a conversation to address the conflict, expressing genuine remorse and seeking forgiveness, actively listening to the other person's perspective, and working collaboratively to resolve underlying issues. These steps foster understanding, heal relationships, and align with the deeper principles of love and forgiveness that Jesus advocates.

4. Verses 25-26 advise quickly settling matters with adversaries. How can this principle be applied in modern conflict resolution? What are the benefits and potential challenges of seeking early resolution?

In these verses, Jesus advises us to quickly settle matters with our adversaries to prevent conflicts from escalating, leading to more significant consequences. Jesus advocates for prompt, proactive engagement to address disputes before they intensify. The benefits of seeking early resolution include preserving relationships, reducing stress, and avoiding a lengthy battle. It also promotes mutual understanding and compromise. However, the challenges to a quick resolution include pride, stubbornness, or entrenched positions. Despite these challenges, early resolution remains a worthy God-honoring goal. Romans 12:18 says, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."

5. In verses 27-28, Jesus equates lustful thoughts with adultery. How does this redefine our understanding of faithfulness and purity? What strategies can we employ to maintain purity?

Jesus redefines faithfulness and purity by teaching that lustful thoughts are equivalent to committing adultery, thereby extending the concept of marital faithfulness beyond physical actions to include mental and emotional purity. This broadens the understanding of purity to encompass one's inner life, emphasizing that true faithfulness involves controlling one's desires and maintaining a pure heart. Strategies to sustain purity include cultivating self-awareness and self-control, avoiding situations that might lead to temptation, engaging in regular self-reflection and prayer, and seeking accountability from trusted individuals. Individuals can strive for a holistic approach to faithfulness and purity in their relationships by focusing on external behavior and internal thoughts.

6. Verses 29-30 suggest taking drastic actions to avoid sin. How should we practically interpret these verses? What are some modern equivalents of "cutting off a hand" to avoid sin? Why are we reluctant to take decisive steps to protect ourselves from sinful situations?

Jesus uses dramatic language to emphasize the seriousness of avoiding sin, suggesting that one should take drastic actions, such as "cutting off a hand" or "gouging out an eye," to prevent sinful behavior. Practically, this means removing anything from our lives that leads us to sin, even if it involves significant sacrifice. Modern equivalents could include ending harmful relationships, avoiding places or situations that trigger temptations, limiting or eliminating access to certain forms of media, and setting strict boundaries with technology to prevent exposure to inappropriate content. The core message is the importance of taking decisive and sometimes difficult steps to protect one's moral and spiritual integrity, demonstrating a commitment to living a righteous life.

7. Verses 31-32 address divorce. How do Jesus' teachings on divorce challenge contemporary views on marriage and commitment? What principles can we derive for maintaining healthy marital relationships?

In these verses, Jesus challenges the contemporary views on marriage and commitment by underscoring the sanctity and permanence of the marital bond, permitting divorce only in the case of

sexual immorality. Jesus' teaching is a stark contrast to our culture's lenient attitude towards divorce. Jesus emphasizes that marriage is a sacred covenant that should not be dissolved lightly, highlighting fidelity's importance and the commitment's seriousness. Principles for maintaining healthy marital relationships include prioritizing open and honest communication, practicing forgiveness and reconciliation, investing time and effort into the relationship, seeking mutual understanding and support, and addressing issues proactively before they escalate. By fostering these principles, couples can work towards sustaining a solid and enduring marriage.

8. In verses 33-37, Jesus advises against making oaths. How does this teaching promote honesty and integrity? How can we cultivate a habit of truthful and straightforward communication?

Jesus advises against making oaths, promoting honesty and integrity by encouraging people to let their "yes" be "yes" and their "no" be "no." This teaching underscores the importance of being truthful and reliable without taking oaths to prove our sincerity. By eliminating the need for oaths, Jesus advocates for straightforward, transparent communication where our word is trustworthy. To cultivate a habit of truthful and straightforward communication, we can practice honesty in small and significant matters, avoid exaggeration or deceit, ensure our actions align with our words, and hold ourselves accountable. Doing so builds a reputation for integrity and fosters trust in our relationships.