

40-05-12.wpd —God's Target Is the Heart

Law, murder, hostility, heart, adultery, lust, marriage, divorce

Mat 5:21-32

God is not after our *outward compliance* but our *inward holiness*.

### **INTRODUCTION:** (text as the Scripture reading)

–In this "Sermon" Jesus was announcing *God's Kingdom*. He started by describing the character of its citizens. Then He said that He came to fulfill [lit., fill up] the OT Law. Part of that meant leading us into a *full understanding* of God's *intention* behind the OT moral law.

–In this teaching process, He used astounding language that identified His divine authority: "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago.... But I tell you..." This terminology called for a decision. Either you reject Jesus as a Jewish heretic, or you accept His authority as greater than that of the OT. That was shocking to people. But Jesus was the King. He was bringing the Kingdom that fulfilled what the OT anticipated. –Jesus' "Sermon" described that Kingdom the way a *blueprint* describes *architecture*. One theme runs throughout the entire message: (title) GOD'S TARGET IS THE HEART. Jesus knew what the "scribes and Pharisees" had taught people, but He wanted to make it extremely clear that **HOM.idea**. So, He took various laws that were being superficially kept and pushed their meaning deep into the heart, where God wanted to establish the Kingdom. He starts with *murder* (read v.21-22).

### **I. God Wants to Stop Murder Where It Starts: *in the Heart***

A. As an act, "murder" is the culmination of an attitude toward another person. BUT Jesus makes the *attitude* "subject to judgment," just as if it was the act itself. (But the attitude, being progressive, allows us time for repentance, as long as we recognize what's happening.)

1. Are we "angry" with someone? (Anger blinds; "judgment" reveals, and may show our own fault in a situation, our hypocrisy for offending others, or our failure to give the situation to God.)
2. Have we said "Raca" ["empty-headed"] about a person's *intelligence*? Or gone deeper, to their *moral character*, by saying, "You fool!"?
  - a. The deeper our hostility, the greater our danger. (If we keep on, we end up *mentally murdering* that person in our heart.)
  - b. Murder violently ends a victim's life, but *mental murder* brings

unending violence into the murderer's life. ["If the penalty for murder is hell, the penalty for mental murder is a living hell."(DLH)]

B. ***In the next verses***, Jesus reverses the situation, describing our duty when we're the offending party (read v.23-24). (God holds us responsible to try to keep others from *mentally murdering* us.)

1. God's target is not *outward compliance* ("offering your gift at the altar"), but *inward holiness* ("be reconciled to your brother").
2. ***God's priority is the heart!*** Loving God in worship is inseparable from loving our neighbor– 1 John 4:20-21, If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother."
3. Again, hostility is progressive, and Jesus shows how even at the last minute, we can make reconciliation (read v.25-26)

**TRANS:** Some people have suffered with relational hostility for years, and still "*the last penny*" remains unpaid. No amount of gifts at the altar can bring Kingdom power into our lives. **Remember: God is not after our outward compliance—He wants our inward holiness**. This is also seen in God's command about *adultery* (read v.27-30)...

### **II. God Wants to Stop Adultery Where It Starts: *in the Heart***

- A. God wants us to keep our eyes and hands, but He says it's better to lose them than let lust use them to distract us from His Kingdom.
- B. God made marriage not just to give sex a *safe home*, but to portray the loyalty and unity between Christ and the Church [Bride of Christ].
  1. [The wound in our Lord's naked side on the Cross reminds how God opened a naked gardener's side and fashioned Eve from one of Adam's ribs, making her his bride. The early church fathers, seeing this parallel, saw in the blood and water that came from Jesus' side the symbols of redemption and baptism that formed the Church.] Adultery disrupts marriages, but also destroys this symbolism about a reality that transcends all marriages.
  2. In earthly marriage and heavenly marriage to Christ, God puts loyalty and unity at heart level, not just meeting social standards.
    - a. God's view of marital faithfulness goes beyond avoiding the act of physical *adultery* to avoiding the vain imagination of letting someone other than the spouse steal that spouse's rightful place in the heart. (Love is the key to this kind of faithfulness, not an *emotional feeling* but a *behavioral choice*.)

- b. The same is true for spiritual faithfulness to Christ: we can *act like Christians on the outside*, but still be *lusting after worldly things on the inside*. –**1 John 2:15**, Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.
- C. The next verses are a logical continuation of this new *heart-level standard for adultery* (read v.31-32).
1. Since OT Law allowed it, *divorce had become easy to get* in that day. But if God's view of marriage was so high that even *mental lust was adultery*, then why did God allow divorce in the first place?– Jesus answered this in **Mat 19:3-9**, The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for *just* any reason?” And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made *them* at the beginning ‘*made them male and female*, and said, ‘*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh*’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?” He said to them, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.”
  2. In **1 John 3:8b (NKJV)** it says, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." God's *ultimate* will is based on His *original* will at creation, not on standards set by sinners. Jesus came to *redeem* and *restore* what was lost "*from the beginning*," not to permit a continuing "hardness of ... hearts."

### CONCLUSION:

–The legalists of that day, with this *hardness of heart*, found loopholes in the Law to avoid certain moral duties. Jesus exposed this hypocrisy by showing how God wasn't after *outward compliance* but *inward holiness*. Jesus alone could bring about that *inward holiness*.

–In preparing this sermon, I wrote a poem about the difference between the Law from Mount Sinai and the Kingdom law of Christ. This poem, ("Sermon on the Mount") describes the differences between the OT & NT.

The heights of Sinai were so steep	But on the Mount, Christ Jesus taught
That even Moses could not keep	A stronger law, and we are caught
Within the blessing of God's hand	By Kingdom grace to flee our sin,
And barely glimpsed the Promised Land.	And by God's love to enter in.

### **Matthew 5:21-32 (NIV)**

- 21“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’
- 22But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.
- 23“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,
- 24leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.
- 25“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison.
- 26I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.
- 27“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’
- 28But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
- 29If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.
- 30And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.
- 31“‘It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’
- 32But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.