

## Jesus Explained the Importance of Reconciliation

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain to others that the only way that they can be righteous is by repenting of their sin of unbelief and receiving the righteousness of Jesus by faith. In this topic, we will see that Jesus began to explain the true meaning of various commandments.

Matthew 5:21-26 says, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.” Through these verses, Jesus explained Exodus 20:13.

Earlier rabbis had explained their interpretation of Exodus 20:13, “You shall not murder.” Those rabbis said that a person who committed murder would be in danger of judgment. That was true, but certainly not the full meaning of that commandment. Jesus went on to explain that murder begins in the heart. This heart attitude is shown by such things as: anger against a person, or insults such as calling a person Raca (Empty-headed), or calling a person a fool. Such anger or insults shows that the attitudes in the heart are sinful and could eventually even lead to murder of their character by words or to physical murder, where the person is killed. Jesus said these attitudes lead to eternal judgment.

Jesus then went on to explain what a person needs to do when they realize that they have such attitudes in their heart. Jesus said if a person had said or done something to a brother that had offended the brother, to go to the brother before offering a sacrifice. In the Old Testament, the purpose of sacrifice was to cover sin until Christ came to pay the penalty to take away sin. We see that the person was to seek reconciliation with the brother even before offering the sacrifice. 1 John 3:18-21 says, “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.” In this verse, we see that words and actions are to go together. The act of seeking reconciliation shows that there is true repentance in the heart.

Jesus warned that if a person makes no effort to settle the conflict, especially a conflict regarding a debt, the adversary might take the person to the judge. The judge would then hear the case and may agree that the adversary is correct. In that case, the judge would deliver the person to the officer who had charge of the prison. In that day, they had a debtor’s prison where the person would have to work until he had paid off the debt. This is illustrated in Matthew 18:32-34, where we read, “Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’” And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.” These verses show us that the result of unresolved conflict can be very severe.

Jesus then went on to show that adultery also begins in the heart. Matthew 5:27-30 says, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.” Exodus 20:14 says, “You shall not commit adultery.” The Jews could quote that commandment just as they quoted each of the commandments. However, Jesus went on to explain the full meaning of this commandment.

The word translated “lust” means *to have a strong desire for something*. In several cases, the word is used in a good sense. Jesus used this word when He said, in Luke 22:15, “Then He said to them, ‘With *ferve*nt desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.’” Here, we see that Jesus had a strong desire to eat the Passover with His disciples before His crucifixion. In other cases, this word is used in an evil sense. Galatians 5:17 says, “For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.” In this case, we see that our human flesh can have strong desires that are against the Holy Spirit. This happens when we are not walking in the Spirit or being led by the Spirit.

In our verses in Matthew, this word is used in an evil sense. When a man looks at a woman that is not his wife to lust for her, Jesus said that man has already committed adultery in his heart. When a man is not being led by the Holy Spirit and is not walking in the Holy Spirit, his heart is exposed to the desires of the flesh. Romans 13:9 says, “For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and if *there* is any other commandment, are *all* summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” In this verse, the word is translated “covet”. Here, we see that a strong desire to violate any of the commands mentioned in this verse is the result of a lack of love for our neighbor. Jesus said that a strong sexual desire for a woman that is not his wife means that the man has already committed adultery in his heart. The same would be true for a woman to have such a desire for a man that is not her husband. In either case, sin has happened in the heart.

Jesus went on to say that it would be better to lose an eye than to have a heart consumed by lust that would keep a person from repentance. The same would be true for a hand. It would be better to have the hand cut off than to have a heart consumed by lust so that it would keep a person from repentance. A heart attitude that keeps a person from coming to Jesus in repentance and faith has serious consequences for eternity. Again, Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” Galatians 5:13 reminds us, as Christians, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” True liberty will cause us to love and serve and not to lust for evil.

Matthew 5:31-32 says, “Furthermore it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.” The Jewish leaders had twisted the meaning of Deuteronomy 24:1-4, which says, “When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts *it* in her hand, and sends her out of his house, when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man’s *wife*, if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts *it* in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife,

*then* her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that *is* an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God is giving you *as* an inheritance.”

These verses are talking about defilement. The Old Testament penalty for adultery was stoning so it is not talking about a woman that committed adultery. Instead, this was due to some other kind of uncleanness. In Matthew 19:3, we read, “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?’” Jesus showed the misunderstanding of the Jewish leaders by His answer to their question. Matthew 19:7-8 says, “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.’” Jesus made it clear that Moses never commanded divorce but only permitted it because of the hardness of their hearts.

Jesus made it clear that immorality was the only Biblical reason that divorce was even allowed. He said that even then divorce was only permitted because of hardness of heart. Matthew 19:5-6 quotes from Genesis 2:24 to show the plan of God for marriage. Those verses say, ‘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.” The world, today, has many hardhearted people who do not recognize the ideal that God has for marriage. That even includes some Christians. From the words of Jesus, in Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:1-9, we see that divorce is only permitted for immorality, but even that has never been the plan of God. The plan of God is for forgiveness. Ephesians 4:32 says, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” God forgave all of our sins because of Christ. We want to help our physical and spiritual children help others learn to forgive one another because of Christ, just as the Father forgives because of Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to help others forgive one another.