>>>>>>> Sermon on the Mount – Lesson 07 <<<<<<<

1) We ended last time with somewhat of a discussion about the Pharisees and the binding of rules in comparison to some of the things that the Church of Christ has done over the years.
2) Before we get started, I would like to make a few comments on the idea of why the Pharisees were as they were.
   a) For the most part, they were not evil. There were some bad things they did but …
   b) And this is the important part – they were really trying to serve God and thought they were doing right – perhaps doing wrong things for right reasons!
   c) Fast forward 2000 years and we find various denominations (not just the Church of Christ) doing the same things – looking at scripture and doing in many cases the wrong things for the right reasons.
   d) The Churches of Christ 40, 50, or even 100 years ago are the same.
   e) We are actually no different today – we are all still trying to look at God's word, apply it to worship and get it right.
   f) As gently as I can, I will tell you – probably not 100% of the time.
   g) Just food for thought and perhaps a little different perspective than we left with last time.

3) Next, Jesus deals with another of the ten commandments #7 – Thou shalt not commit adultery.
   a) In truth, not so much the act but the mindset behind the act.

Matthew 5:27–30 (ESV)

Lust

27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

4) Here, even though Jesus uses the "You have heard that it was said…" phrase, the actual commandment does say the same thing.

Deuteronomy 5:18 (ESV)

18 " 'And you shall not commit adultery.

5) But as we see that he treats it the same – "But I say to you …"
6) Lust is one of those words that we really want to define differently but no matter how we try it comes to the same conclusion in this context.
   a) Desire is at the heart of it.
   b) It is that the lusting person wants what is before his or her eyes.
      i) It is not just an observation (handsome or beautiful) but desire.
      ii) "In other words, if I could then I would figure away to have that person."
   c) In this case, it is very clear what the desire is – sexual – leading to adultery.

d) Adultery is also clearly defined – the word means the same today as it did 2000 plus years ago.

i) In this case, Oxford and Webster both say the same thing, in fact, almost verbatim.

Oxford – voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and a person who is not his or her spouse.

Webster – voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and **someone other than that person's current spouse or partner.**

e) However, when we look at the word lust, we get a little bit of difference.

Oxford – very strong sexual desire.

Webster – unusually intense or unbridled sexual desire | lasciviousness

: an intense longing | craving
: enthusiasm, eagerness

7) To be sure, again, this word is also basically the same in meaning today as it was 2000 years ago.

BDAG – for lust (ἐπιθυμέω) it gives, "to have sexual interest in someone, desire."

8) Now that we have all these definitions together let's look at the heart of the matter (PUN INTENDED!)

9) The bottom-line we have here in truth is something that I cannot define for you, nor can you define it for me.

a) It truly is a matter of what we are feeling in our hearts – only each of us and God knows our intent when we see an attractive person.

b) Keeping it in the personal, Jesus brings it into focus in the heart:

but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

10) Then He begins these famous or infamous metaphorical statements about cutting off the hand or gouging out the eye that offends us.

11) What he really says is we are to get rid of the thoughts from the heart that envision us doing the thing.

First, do you think it would do any good to move from the metaphorical to the real and remove the offending part?

If not, then how do we accomplish what He is suggesting?

12) Obviously, one way is to avoid situations that expose you to these kinds of thoughts.

a) I had a Christian friend tell me once he really wished porn was legal – that speaks volumes to a mindset that is perhaps in the wrong place?

13) One of my favorite scriptures that really applies to this answer is:

Philippians 4:8 (NASB 2020)

[8] Finally, brothers *and sisters,* whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

14) In other words, control the mind by putting good things in place of the bad!

1) Next, Jesus weighs in on divorce …

Matthew 5:31–32 (ESV)

Divorce

[31] "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' [32] But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

2) Here, we need to look again at the mindset of those listening to Jesus that day.
3) This subject of divorce was hotly debated among the Jews during Jesus' time.
4) The original law stated …

Deuteronomy 24:1–4 (ESV)

Laws Concerning Divorce

24 "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, [2] and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, [3] and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, [4] then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.

5) At this time there were two distinct schools of thought on divorce.
   a) The school of Rabbi Hillel represented one stand on the subject and the school of Rabbi Shammai the other.
      i) The school of Hillel said that a man could divorce his wife for basically any reason.
      ii) This is a very liberal interpretation of the original law as laid down in Deuteronomy.
      iii) The phrases "she finds no favor in his eyes" and "some indecency in her" stated in Deuteronomy meant for Hillel virtually anything from a burnt dinner to the way she wore her hair to sexual immorality or adultery.
      iv) The school of Shammai on the other hand insisted that divorce could only be granted for reasons of adultery.
   b) Obviously, there is quite a difference in the way folks looked at the subject.
      i) Both Hillel and Shammai died in the early 1st century. The school oft Hillel became dominant in Pharisaic Judaism.
      ii) The school of Shammai briefly gained influence between 66 and 70 CE then declined.

iii) But again, these were two dominate opinions of the people listening to Jesus that day.

c) Jesus is very clear on the subject – He is definitely not in the Hillel camp.

6) In fact, when we look at what Jesus is saying, we can clearly see divorce can never be a frivolous thing.

a) Jesus as the knower of all things understood the truth behind the original law and therefore makes the statement that He makes.

32 but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for *the* reason of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

The literal translation of the phrase "makes her commit adultery" is "he makes her be committed adultery / become adulterized."

In the first century, a divorced woman was expected to remarry to survive.

In that situation, relations with her new husband would be considered adultery.

The important part here is that this is back on the husband who divorces her because by doing so, he puts her and her new husband in an adulterous situation.

(i) The LABC and Bruce Barton explains it this way:

The religious leaders permitted easy divorce, as well as remarriage after divorce. But Jesus said that the sacred union of marriage should not be broken and that to remarry after divorce was committing adultery. However, Jesus here gave one exception regarding divorce, an exception not included in the same teaching recorded in Mark 10:1–12. The Greek word translated "marital unfaithfulness" is porneia. It has a broad range of definitions, referring to (1) committing adultery (one offense); (2) unfaithfulness during the betrothal (engagement) period; (3) an illegitimate or incestuous marriage (the man and wife were later discovered to be near relatives); or (4) continued and unrepented unfaithfulness. Any of these reasons would mean that a rupture had already occurred in the marriage. For a man to divorce his wife for one of these reasons was simply a recognition that his union with her had been ended by her sexual union with another. It would be possible then that adultery would be an exception to the prohibition against remarriage.9

7) One other uniqueness of divorce in the 1st century was that women were not able to divorce men.

a) Although a woman could not issue a get herself, she could petition a Jewish court to compel her husband to divorce her in certain circumstances.

b) According to one source I read, men could commit adultery with an unmarried woman and it would not be considered adultery at all.

i) True or not, there was a major inequality in all this.

c) Women in those times were unfortunately really considered property.

8) Another factor that figured into the divorce equation was the monies which were exchanged when the marriage took place.

[9] Bruce B. Barton, *Matthew*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 98–99.

a) In case of a divorce, depending on the reasons, the dowry could go with the wife making this one thing that perhaps would cause the husband to have second thoughts before frivolously divorcing his wife.

9) By observation, today's society is definitely more in Hillel's camp than Shammai's.

1) Continuing we read ...

Matthew 5:33–37 (ESV)

Oaths

33 "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely,
but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' 34 But I say to you, Do not take
an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is
his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 And do not take
an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 Let what you
say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

2) We discussed this during Don's study of "The Quest for Truth" and also at some length when we studied James.

3) So, we will do a quick review of this and perhaps hit a couple of new points.

4) In our society today, at least in the US, there are several times one is required to take an oath:

   a) In court when we are testifying.

      i) Even in this situation today, most courts are offering alternatives moving toward generic oaths or affirmations without any religious text or context involved.

   b) Oaths are required when we enter the military, sworn into an office, and the codes for some professions.

5) This situation is really in stark contrast to the 1st century.

   a) In the 1st century, oaths were very highly regarded at all levels.

   b) They were most always connected to religious beliefs and even specific deities.

      i) Many oaths were required to be sworn by the Emperor who was most often deified.

   c) People took oaths as witnesses and guarantors of their promises and in legal proceedings.

      i) Oaths were crucial and were used in both social and political contexts, to solidify agreements, alliances, and loyalties.

   d) Most 1st century societies, including the Romans and it seems especially the ancient Israelites placed a high value on the sanctity of oaths.

6) The Jewish people were especially keen on personal oaths, so much so that they added their own special twist to them.

   a) They set up a hierarchy; how binding things were vs. the object you swore by...

   b) The 10 objects of their oaths were:

      i) God's name
      ii) The temple
      iii) The altar
      iv) Heaven
      v) Earth

vi) Jerusalem Covers ii, iii, and viii
vii) One's own head Covers ix and x
viii) The Law/Torah
ix) The lives of your children
x) By one's own life

c) The hierarchy was:

i) Most Binding – Direct oaths using God's name.

ii) Highly Binding – Oaths made using sacred objects (Temple, altar, sacrifices).

iii) Binding (avoided using God's name) – Oaths by natural elements (heaven, earth)

iv) Obligatory (less formal) – Personal oaths were more easily broken.

7) Jesus and James are addressing the same set of problems.

a) First, one of the biggest issues here is the third commandment.

Exodus 20:7 (ESV)

7 "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

b) Going back to Jesus' teachings, we can see the problem clearly when we look closely.

c) If we look at verses 34-37 again, we see that He directly gets rid of 4 out of the 10 of the objects that are on the list we just read.

34 But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by **heaven**, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by **the earth**, for it is his footstool, or by **Jerusalem**, for it is the city of the great King. 36 And do not take an oath **by your head**, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

i) In truth, I think the others go away by association with these 4 as well.

d) This of course also gets rid of the hierarchical system they had in place.

8) Many scholars do not really see this as an issue of what you are swearing by.

a) Instead, they put forth that the real problem being addressed is one of honesty.

b) I definitely agree that honesty is a major thing that is being addressed here.

c) In considering that, we must realize that honesty is in actuality, a two-way street,

i) When we obey Jesus' command to let our yes be yes and no be no, it is inferred that as the hearer, we must do the same.

ii) In other words, we must believe what our brothers and sisters say and not require an oath.

(1) This is truly not how things were being done in the first century!

9) However, in addition, if we really look at what both Jesus and James are saying, the recipients of this teaching have another problem, and it is a BIG PROBLEM!

10) Their brothers and sisters might accept their yes or no, but Rome would not accept a simple yes or no.

11) If, by law, you were required to swear an oath to a specific deity including the Emperor, you were also being required to break this teaching.

12) There were many 1st century Christians who were martyred for that very reason – they would not break this teaching.
    a) One such story in Eusebius' history …
13) I know this is a lot of repeats of what we studied in James, but truth is he was addressing the exact same issue that Jesus is teaching here.

So, what are our takeaways? What does this command say to you and me today right here in Ft. Worth at the corner of Altamesa and Hulen?

a) Obvious #1 – Not to take the Lord's name in vain.
b) Obvious #2 – Be truthful in all things and all ways – "yes be yes and no be no".
c) Obvious #3 – Do not swear frivolously.
d) Obvious #4 – Do not swear by other things.
e) NOT so obvious #5– What about oaths of office, witnesses, etc.?