

The Six Antitheses of Matt. 5

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A Sermon Demanding Exceedingly High Levels of Righteousness

- When we consider the many direct implications the Sermon on Mount has on each individual person desiring to follow Christ, it is rather hard to argue that there ever has been more a demanding sermon requiring intense self-examination and change on the part of the listener.
- After all, Jesus flatly states that a New Testament Christian is required to live on a higher moral plane than those who lived under the Law of Moses.
 - **“Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven”** (Matt. 5:19-20).
- Our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of a devout Pharisee (like Saul of Tarsus). Talk about a high bar (see also Matt. 5:48)!

The Sermon on the Mount is Part of the Gospel Message

- During the Sermon on the Mount we see Jesus presenting His gospel truth on numerous topics that directly contradicted the views of those to whom He was preaching.
- Matt. 5 is part of the gospel, meaning, it is intended for application by Christians in every age.
 - **“And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom”** (Matt. 4:23a; see also Matt. 5:1).
- Therefore, Jesus’s sermon was not something strictly limited in application to the first century, neither was it just intended for the Jews, nor was this message just Jesus correcting misunderstandings of the Law of Moses. Rather, this sermon was intended to provide lessons for the Lord’s disciples in the first century and in every age to come.

Preparatory Teaching

- We might call Jesus's teaching in Matt. 5 as "preparatory" teaching, or teaching that would be binding at a future time and not at the time it was preached because the death of the Testator (Jesus) had not taken place yet.
 - **"For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives"** (Heb. 9:16-17).
- The New Testament law did not go into effect until **AFTER** Jesus died, when He figuratively nailed the Law of Moses to the cross with Him (Col. 2:14), but that did not stop Jesus from teaching preparatory things.
 - Consider John 3:3-5 and Matt. 5:17-18.

Six Contrasts

- Throughout Matt. 5, a recurring thought appears six times in v. 21, 27, 31, 33, 38, & 43.
 - In these verses, Jesus says something to the effect of:
 - **“It has been said . . . But I say unto you,”** or
 - **“You have heard that it was said to those of old . . . But I say unto you.”**
- The repetition of this thought highlights six contrasts between the Law of Moses and Christ’s New Testament law that would soon replace the Old Law.
- In all six instances, Jesus quotes exactly or accurately represents an Old Testament passage in order to introduce His stricter gospel teaching.

Contrast #1: Sin Can Exist Before Physically Acting

“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.”

- In Matt. 5:21-22, Jesus quotes one of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:13) and appears to paraphrase another Old Testament passage (Num. 35:12) to illustrate how it’s not just wrong to kill someone, but it’s wrong to mistreat them, speak ill against them, evilly surmise against them, be angry against them without cause, call them a fool, etc., even without ever acting out against them physically.
- Simply put, Jesus’s New Testament teaching says that sin is present long before a physical act has ever taken place (consider 1 John 3:15a).
- We see this principle of sin being present long before a physical act occurs in v.27-29 as well.

Contrasts #2-3: Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

“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.”

- In Matt. 5:27-29, Jesus provides another exact quote of one of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:14), but He then makes a much stricter declaration that if a man if you look at a person with lustful intent, then you have already committed adultery with her in your heart.
- While it is certainly a sin to commit adultery in the heart (v.28), that sin is not a justifiable reason for a man to divorce his wife. Only adultery in the bed serves as scriptural grounds for divorce (see Heb. 13:4; John 8:3-4; Lev. 20:10-13).
- Passages like Matt. 5:31-32 (the next contrast) and Matt. 19:8-9 are talking about the literal (physical) act of adultery/fornication, which is what we might call “following through” on the lust present in a person’s heart.

Contrasts #2-3: Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

“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.”

- In Matt. 5:31-32, Jesus quotes Deut. 24:1-4 to explain how if a man desires to divorce his wife for **“uncleanness”** (something short of fornication since adulterers were to be stoned [Lev. 20:10]), he must give her a certificate of divorce. In contrast to the Law of Moses, divorce is no longer permitted unless the spouse commits fornication.
 - Jesus reiterated this in Matt. 19:8-9 by admitting Moses did allow (or permit) divorce for reasons other than fornication, but explained that **“from the beginning it was not so.”**
- Matt. 19:9 shows Jesus’s New Testament teaching was going to be the same as God had it in the very beginning when He first instituted marriage (i.e. no divorce) and not as loose as the Old Covenant.
- That means divorce, unless on the grounds of fornication, is a sin, and if a divorce not for fornication is followed by remarriage, adultery has occurred.

Contrasts #2-3: Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

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- Incidentally, Matt. 5:31-32 clearly disproves those preaching the doctrine of mental divorce wrong in their conclusion that legal/civil procedures have nothing to do with beginning or ending a marriage.
- This “**certificate of divorce**” was a “**legal document**” (Matt. 5:32, NET), not just an informal piece of paper like a sticky note written on with crayons that a husband was required to give his wife in order to scripturally divorce her.

Contrast #4: Do Not Swear

“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,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.”

- In Matt. 5:33-36, Jesus flatly states “**do not swear at all.**” There are no caveats.
- Moses’s law taught it was okay to swear but wrong to “**forswear thyself**” (KJV), or swear to do something and then fail to follow through on that commitment (Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2; Psalm 15:1-4). The gospel message is much stricter though.
- James put it this way:
 - “**But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No,’ lest you fall into judgment**” (James 5:12).

Contrasts #5-6: No Authority to Harm Another Person

“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 to him also” (Matt. 5:38-39).

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:43-48).

Contrast #5-6: No Authority to Harm Another Person

- There are several quotes from the Law of Moses here that Jesus uses to illustrate this very basic yet very divisive point that if someone seeks to harm us, we have no right to harm them.
- The Old Law most certainly taught it was authorized to return violence for violence (Exod. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Num. 35:19), but Jesus's new law never authorizes such.
- Those under the Law of Moses were permitted to hate their enemies (Deut. 23:3-7; Psalm 26:5, 31:6, 139:21-22). Yet, the Law of Christ says, "**Love your enemies.**"
- The Law of Christ teaches the exact opposite of what the Law of Moses taught regarding how we are to view and treat our enemies.
 - Vengeance is no longer in the hands of man to act upon (whether personal, national, etc.), but strictly belongs to God (Rom. 12:17-21, 13:10; Matt. 5:43-48; Luke 10:25-37; 1 Cor. 13:5b).
- Jesus left us the perfect example we must follow (1 Pet. 2:21-23).

Contrast #5-6: No Authority to Harm Another Person

- The Israelites could utterly destroy their enemies (remember what Saul was supposed to do to the Amalekites?), but Christians are to love our enemies, bless them, do good to them, pray for them, and never do them harm.
- If we do these things, we can be children of God (Matt. 5:45); if we do the opposite, however, we will not be God's children.

See why it's so very important that we understand this sermon correctly?