

The Law of God, Your Adversary, Women, and Your Wife

by Dick Woodward

Dick Woodward's sermon explores the deeper meanings of Jesus' teachings on the law, relationships, and the importance of inner attitudes.

Duration: 30:42

Scripture: Matthew 5:17-20, Matthew 5:25, Matthew 5:27-30, Matthew 6:33, Luke 12:58-59

Topics: "Law Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the teacher focuses on the importance of applying the word of God to our lives and relationships. He contrasts his approach to scripture with that of the religious establishment, emphasizing the need to pass the law of God through the prism of the love of God. The teacher explains that Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount provide practical guidance for discipleship. He specifically highlights the instruction to agree with one's adversary quickly, illustrating the consequences of not doing so. The sermon concludes with a prayer for the listeners to grow in faith and knowledge, and to be filled with God's love and grace.

Transcript

Today, our teacher is going to share more of the awesome yet practical teachings of Jesus Christ found in His Sermon on the Mount. Welcome to another important lesson here in the mini-Bible college. We are so glad that you have decided to study God's Word with us and that you want to be one of Jesus' disciples.

Now let us join our teacher for today's very practical lesson. Agree with your adversary quickly while you're 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. We are at the place in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus is showing His disciples while they are on that mountaintop the proper use of the Word of God, how to pass the law of God through the prism of the love of God before they apply the law of God to the lives of people and how to come to the Scripture and find the spirit of the law as compared to the letter of the law.

In the first part of this great teaching that we call the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has told us to look inward. He talked to us about attitudes and then He gave us eight beautiful attitudes. He seems to say, now look around, consider the challenge when the kind of character you have in your heart by the grace of God is applied to the culture.

That is the general way of putting it. Now He is explaining it clearly. In the first paragraph that we looked at here in chapter 5, He begins to illustrate the difference between His approach to the Scripture as He applied the Scripture to the lives of people and the approach of the religious establishment as they applied Scripture to the lives of people.

In the first paragraph, He focused upon how to apply all of these things to your brother. Now He mentions your adversary. Who exactly is your adversary and how do you treat him? Well, first you see a paragraph that began based upon the commandment thou shalt not kill.

He was disagreeing with the way the religious leaders interpreted and applied that command. They were saying that the only thing that matters in your relationship to your brother is do not kill him. As long as you don't kill him, you have nothing to worry about.

You're not going to go to prison or be in danger of that kind of judgment. Jesus is saying, listen, that's missing the spirit of the law. The spirit of the law is to be right with your fellow man, be right with your brother, be reconciled to your brother, and do not even hold anger or resentment in your heart towards your brother.

If you find yourself putting your brother down, speaking of him with contempt, that is when you are really in danger because that is the heart of the matter. That is the spirit of the law. It is to have the right relationship with your brother.

Now Jesus is extending that a little bit as He includes the adversary, the brother who is out there trying to give you trouble. You may not be able to control him, but you certainly can control your attitudes toward him. Jesus continues with another paragraph here, which is another way of elaborating upon what He said in verses 17 through 20, that there is a difference between the way I, Jesus, approach the Scripture and the way the religious leaders approach the Scripture.

Here's a famous paragraph from the Sermon on the Mount. 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.

And if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out, 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 your whole body be cast into hell. That's found in Matthew chapter 5 verses 27 through 30.

I'm amazed at how some people will interpret this statement of Jesus as if He were saying that to think adultery is as bad as actually committing adultery. Many people follow through on that and say, well I cannot help but think about it. And if that is as bad as actually committing adultery, then I might as well go ahead and commit adultery because I surely cannot keep myself from thinking about it.

There's a difference between the way He, Jesus, approaches the Scriptures and the way the scribes and the Pharisees approach the Scripture. If you want to get to the spirit of the law, if you want to see what

God had on His heart when He wrote the law, and to apply that law to yourself and to the lives of other people, well Jesus is giving another illustration here. He is saying it's like it was with your brother and your adversary.

Now let me tell you how to relate the Scripture to yourself and to others when it comes to women. You see, He has told us how to look inward. That's in the Beatitudes.

Now He is telling us how to look around and apply those beautiful attitudes in the relationships of our lives. He mentions our brother and our adversary, and now He mentions women. I have a theory that when Jesus met on the mountaintop with those He had invited personally to join Him there, they must have been only men because He was talking to them about women.

He's telling men how to relate the Scripture to their own lives and the lives of others where women are concerned. He's not really saying here that thinking about adultery is as bad as committing adultery. The issue is, do you want to commit adultery or do you not want to commit adultery? In the book of James, which many people feel is a parallel almost like a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, James gives us what one might call the anatomy of sin.

James tells us in chapter 1 that the beginning of sin is like a lure, like a bait, and then there's that look at that lure. Now you cannot help the first look, but you keep on looking and looking. Well, James calls that lust.

He says in his anatomy of a sin that the next thing is lust. You have a lure, a bait, you have a look, and then if there's a continuous looking, there's lust. There's a strong desire for that lure.

He's teaching us this so we will not sin. And Jesus is saying to us in so many words that you have to do something about that lure, the look, the continuous look, the lust. He tells us in James chapter 1 that it's almost as though your lust is a magnet and that lure is a piece of metal.

If you don't break up the magnetic field between your lust and that lure, you're going to be drawn right to that lure. This is the kind of thing Jesus is teaching here to these men on the mountaintop. He is not saying that it is as bad to lustfully look at a woman as it is to commit adultery with her.

He is saying that the point is do you want to commit adultery or do you not? If you don't want to commit adultery, maybe you cannot help taking the first look, but you can surely help yourself by not taking the second look. One of the great church fathers said, you cannot stop birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair. If you keep looking and looking and thinking lustfully about that woman, then it's probably a matter of time until that woman will be sitting in your lap.

Jesus is saying that the spirit of the law is not simply to not commit adultery. The overt act of adultery, the scribes and the Pharisees were saying that as long as you don't sleep with her, you haven't sinned. Well, Jesus is saying no, the spirit of the law goes much further than that.

The spirit of the law raises the question, do you want to sin or do you not want to sin? If you do not want to sin, then even though you cannot help taking the first look, do not take the second look, and do not keep looking, and do not lust, do not have this strong desire, and do not keep thinking about that woman. If you do not break up the magnetic field between your lust and the lure that this woman is to you, it's only a matter of time until you will actually commit the overt act of adultery. In connection with telling us how to prevent this sin, Jesus gives an awesome teaching.

He says, if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. And Jesus says, if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. In another place, Jesus even mentions the foot in a similar way.

Now, what did he mean by that? The right eye was considered the better eye, and the right hand was considered the better hand. So one thing Jesus is saying here is this, sin is such an awesome thing that you really have to discipline yourself in order to keep from sinning. Even if it costs you your right eye, even if it costs you your right hand, you must get serious about sin.

You must realize that sin is like a cancer. As you cannot coexist with cancer, so you cannot coexist with sin. If you do not do something about sin, it's going to destroy you.

That is the way sin is. So you've got to get serious about not having sin in your life. Now, Jesus is not saying here literally to pluck out your eye or to cut off your hand.

If you think practically about it, if you did take your right eye out or cut off your right hand, you still have your left eye. You can still see. And if you can sin with your right eye, then you can probably sin with your left eye.

And the same thing is true of your hand. I believe that what Jesus is teaching is something like this. If what you are looking at is leading you to sin, then stop looking.

Or if what you are doing with your hand, not necessarily what you are doing with your hands, but whatever you are doing, if what you are doing is going to lead you to sin, then stop doing it. When he mentions the foot in connection with this metaphor, you might apply it this way. If where you are going will lead you to sin, then do not go.

The eye represents all that you see. And because you see it, you want it. The hand represents all your activity, what you do all day.

The foot represents where you go. Now, most people commit adultery in their mind before they ever leave the house. In the scripture, the eye represents the mind.

In chapter 6 of Matthew, Jesus will say, the lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.

What Jesus is describing there is how we see things. We can have a life that is happy, a body filled with light, or we can have a life that is unhappy, a body filled with darkness. It depends on how we see things, our outlook, our mindset.

What Jesus is teaching here, if you do not want to commit adultery with a woman, then you must discipline your outlook. You must discipline your mind. Sin begins in the mind.

Lust is a product of the mind. It is something that goes on in your mind. It's in your thought life.

Jesus is saying simply, if you don't want to commit adultery, you've got to discipline your mind. That means the eye or whatever you look at and what you see. The Bible's philosophy about temptation is always this, you are no pillar of strength.

Every single day Jesus said you should pray, lead us not into temptation. Oh, do not let us be tempted. In the anatomy of a sin, as James presents it in chapter one, first you have this lure, bait, and this look, and then you've got this lust.

But you still have not gotten temptation until the actual confrontation comes. And scripture says that Jesus was tempted in all ways as we are, yet he without sin. It's no sin to be tempted.

The question is this, do you want to sin or do you not want to sin? The time to win the battle is not at the point of temptation or overt confrontation. The time to win or lose the battle is before we ever leave home. It is the set of a sale.

It is the way you think. It is what you are going to do today, where you're going to go today. When you make those kinds of decisions in your mind, that is the point when you win or lose the battle in this kind of sin.

Jesus is saying that this is the spirit of the seventh commandment, thou shalt not commit adultery. And the scribes and the Pharisees are simply telling you that as long as you don't sleep with her, you have not sinned. Well, that's not the way to arrive at the spirit of this law.

If you get to the spirit of this commandment, you realize that the purpose of the commandment was that we would not sin. Adultery really is not good. It's not good for us.

It's not good for our wife. It's not good for our children. And it's not good for the other person involved.

When you count the cost and consider the banquet of consequences, then if you really do not want to sin, be concerned about looking and lusting. In other words, build some fences to protect yourself from the overt confrontation with temptation. That is the spirit of this commandment as we consider how to relate the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount to women.

Now in Matthew chapter 5, verses 31, 32, we read, 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 with her.

I have just read verses 31 and 32 of Matthew chapter 5. We are in the most difficult section of the Sermon on the Mount. We have come across two verses that most pastors would rather avoid as they preach on Sunday mornings. But when you are moving through a portion of Scripture verse by verse, you cannot simply avoid difficult verses like these two.

We will find more difficult verses later on in this chapter, in the last two paragraphs of the chapter, when Jesus speaks to us about loving our enemies. But here, Jesus is going to give us some teaching about our wives. You see, these two commandments are definitely related.

Apparently, the reason that the scribes and the Pharisees took the approach they did to the thou shalt not commit adultery was probably because of the lust in their hearts. Perhaps they did not wish to deal with that. And that is why they took this letter of the law approach to the seventh commandment.

And then their approach toward divorce was probably for the same reason. It may have been that they wanted a loose commandment where divorce was concerned, because they did not want to live with their

wives exclusively. And so what they had been teaching, according to verse 31, was apparently something like this.

Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce. Now that is biblical. That goes back to Deuteronomy chapter 24, verse 1. Moses had made that allowance.

But as Jesus points out in Matthew chapter 19, Moses did that as a concession. He was really trying to protect women when he did that. In the Old Testament times, if a man was displeased with his wife for practically any reason, he could divorce her and send her away.

The poor woman had no options. She was really in a desperate situation. A woman could hardly survive in a culture like that if she did not have a husband.

And he did not have to tell anyone why he divorced her. The implication could have been that she had been unfaithful to him, or that she had otherwise just not been a good wife. But it really put the woman in a terrible position.

And so Moses, to protect the wife, made this a requirement. If you divorce your wife, you've got to give her a certificate of divorce. And that certificate of divorce must state the reason for the divorce.

Then the woman could show the certificate if necessary. If she had not been unfaithful, for which she would have been stoned to death if it could have been proven, she could show the certificate of divorce to prove what the facts actually were in her case. That was for the woman's protection.

It was never God's or Moses' intention that there would be divorce. But if there were, the husband must then give a certificate for the protection of the woman. Certain religious leaders had come to Jesus and had asked him the question in Matthew chapter 19, verse 3, Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason? You see, that is what they were doing at the time.

And look at the response of Jesus to that. 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. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate.

Why then, these same religious leaders ask, did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce and to put her away? And he said to them, Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was never that way. 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 with her. His disciples said to Jesus, If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry.

Jesus said this to them, All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given, only those whom God helps. That gives you an idea of where these people were culturally on the subject of marriage and divorce, especially the religious leaders. Moses never really commanded people to divorce their wives.

However, if they divorce their wife, they must give her a certificate showing the grounds for the divorce. Jesus responded to the religious leaders by saying, Moses permitted that because your hearts were hard, but it was not that way from the beginning. It was never God's intent that that should be the case.

I've always been amazed that even the disciples there in Matthew 19 said to Jesus, Well, if that is the way it is, if this marriage relationship is really indissoluble, it would be better not to marry at all. Jesus did not respond to that by saying, Well, you can get some pastor or some lawyer who talks out of both sides of his mouth at one time, and you can tie those things in loopholes. He did not say that.

He said, Listen, you will never experience what God intended when he planned marriage, unless God helps you, unless the Holy Spirit is given to you and you are given the grace to be what you're supposed to be to that wife in that marriage. Going back to chapter 5 of Matthew, where Jesus is saying the religious leaders have been teaching you that the whole issue about your wife is this. If you don't want to live with her anymore, then divorce her as long as you give her a certificate showing why you divorced her.

Let me tell you the way I see it and what the spirit of the law is really. Anyone who divorces his wife except for marital unfaithfulness causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. This is considered one of the hard sayings of Jesus.

It certainly must have been to those at that time, because even the disciples said, If that is the way it is, if you cannot get out of the marriage, it would be better never to marry at all. Again, you have to go back to the beginning. That is where Jesus takes them in Matthew chapter 19.

What was the intent of God when he gave this commandment? What was the purpose of God when this law was given? What is the spirit of this law? What is the purpose and principle of this law, and how is God's love expressed through this commandment? If you think about it for a minute, it goes all the way back to Genesis chapter 1 and 2. In the beginning, it was God's plan to take two persons and bring them together into a partnership so that as a result of that partnership, they would produce persons who, one day, themselves would join to another partner and produce persons who would, one day, themselves as persons become partners and produce little persons. You see, that is the law of God for populating the earth with good people. Now, in order for this law to work, God has to have two adequate persons, and those two adequate persons have to have an adequate partnership, and then that adequate partnership will produce adequate persons who go out into the world to have adequate partnerships and be adequate parents.

In the Old Testament, Solomon said, It is as if those persons who become partners are like a bow, and the persons they produce, their children, are like arrows. This marriage and this partnership as a bow will thrust these people or arrows out into the world. The amount of thrust and direction with which the arrows go out into the world depends upon the bow from which they have been thrust.

If you knew that this was the law of God and you wanted to sabotage or destroy the whole effect, what would you do? Would you not cut the string on that bow? It seems that is what the evil one has been doing for centuries and centuries. He knows that this is the way the earth is to be populated with good people. It all depends upon that partnership, that bow from which the arrows are being thrust.

So just cut the string on the bow and the whole family breaks down. Well, the evil one has been trying to break down this basic law of life since the beginning, and even the religious leaders have been influenced by the evil one. Apparently, because they looked upon this partnership very lightly, they did not take it seriously.

Why is it that Jesus ties the knot so tightly here? Why is it that he teaches what we call the indissolubility of the marriage relationship? It is not just for the benefit of the two partners. It's for the benefit of the

children, and it's not just for the benefit of the children alone. It's for the glory of God, because this is how God wants to populate the earth with good people.

The only way this design can work is for this to be a providential tie between these two people. In Matthew 19, Jesus taught that they have to have God's help. It is a providential tie because it was God's idea.

It's a providential tie because it's the plan of God for populating the earth with good people. Remember again the context of the Sermon on the Mount. There are all kinds of people gathered around the slopes of the Sea of Galilee who have every kind of problem imaginable.

Jesus is ministering to those problems, and he withdraws from that ministry and holds this retreat on the mountaintop where he wants to produce people who will be solutions and answers to all the problems at the bottom of the hill. All the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount should be seen in that perspective or in that context. Why are there so many problems at the bottom of the hill? Here's one reason, because people have lost the spirit of the marriage law.

They are interpreting the marriage law in terms of the letter of the law, and they have forgotten the principle, the purpose, the spirit of the law concerning marriage. Marriage is God's plan for populating the earth with good people. If that plan breaks down, then you have chaos in society because they are pumping into the life stream, into the stream of humanity, inadequate people.

When Jesus gives this hard saying here about marriage, he does give one basis for divorce, as many people interpret this. The way Jesus states the proposition here in verse 32, one has to conclude that except for marital unfaithfulness, Christian marriage is a contract between two people that is based upon exclusiveness. When exclusiveness is violated, the contract is null and void.

That is the way many interpret marriage based upon verse 32. Some say that the Jewish idea here was that if during the betrothal period a couple had their wedding night and the husband discovered that his wife was not a virgin, he then had the option of putting or sending her away. Or he had the option to say, I'm not going to marry her anyway.

Once he decided to take her as his wife and not put her away, then from that point on the marriage relationship was indissoluble. That is the interpretation some give to this matter. Frankly, I believe it's consistent with other scriptures to say that Jesus did give a basis for divorce, but only one basis.

This is consistent with other scriptures. For instance, the teaching of Matthew 19 is that two are made one flesh. Marriage is a tie between two people that results in them being one flesh.

Infidelity violates that oneness. The fifth chapter of Genesis says that God created them male and female and blessed them and called their name Adam. Not the Adamses, but Adam.

The man and the wife together were one Adam, and Adam in Hebrew means man. We use the term man generically, meaning people, human beings. When God said it is not good for man to be alone, that could be applied generically, meaning people.

But for two people to be one in marriage, the Apostle Paul says it's unthinkable for them to become one with somebody else. In 1 Corinthians chapter 6, Paul says the Corinthians, who had a lot of sexual immorality in their backgrounds before they became believers, immorality that seemed to carry over into their experience as a church. Do you not know that he that unites himself with a prostitute, that he who has

sex with a prostitute is actually one flesh with her? Now you cannot be one flesh with more than one person.

So you are one flesh with your wife, and if you sleep with somebody else, and thus you become one flesh with her, that violates the oneness with the wife. Therefore, it is a basis for divorce when the oneness is violated. Of course, that is a two-way street.

If it happens with the wife, the husband is free to seek divorce. If it happens with the husband, the wife is likewise free to seek divorce. Now that does not mean they must seek divorce.

It simply means that they do have that option because this oneness, this exclusive oneness, has been violated. And when the exclusiveness is violated, there is no longer any oneness in the marriage. But again, remember the spirit of the law and the letter of the law that Jesus is illustrating in these passages in Matthew chapter 5. In each of these six paragraphs, he is explaining what he said in verses 17 through 20.

He is saying there is a difference between the way I apply the scripture and the way the scribes and the Pharisees apply the scripture. I come at the scripture in terms of the spirit of the law, and they are coming at it in terms of the letter of the law. I am passing the law of God through the prism of the law of God before I apply the law of God to the lives of people.

But the Pharisees are treating people by the letter of the law and not a spirit of love. He made that statement in verses 17 through 20, and then in each of these six paragraphs, which all begin with Jesus saying in effect, they have been telling you, but now let me tell you the way it really is. He is illustrating what he said in verses 17 through 20.

He is also showing the people on the mountaintop who heard the teaching about the Beatitudes, which instructed them to look inward, instructing them now to look around and let him show them how they should apply these things in their relationships to their brother, their adversary, women in general, and then their wives. We are to do likewise. One of the reasons why the religious establishment was reluctant to give up this means of divorce was because of lust and probably sexual sin.

Probably many of them were not living exclusively with their wives, and that's why they wanted this interpretation of adultery, as well as this interpretation of the divorce teaching, which made it easy to divorce. Now, I would like to say this, as we consider the subject of divorce, we have looked at the spirit of this law and seen why it is necessarily true that this relationship must be a relationship that is based upon exclusiveness. I would like to say this.

There are many, many people in the church of Jesus Christ today who were divorced before they ever came to Christ. In some cases, they may have been divorced several times. Maybe they have had two or three marriages before they heard the gospel and became believers.

Now, when those people come into the body of Christ, are they to be treated like second-class citizens all the days of their lives? What should be the attitude of the church toward them? Here's where I think it's important for us to really understand the spirit of the law as Jesus is illustrating it and applying it here in this part of Matthew chapter 5. We must pass the law of God through the prism of the love of God before we apply this law of God to the lives of people. When you hear a word like justified, which means just as if I had never sinned, when you understand the teaching of the gospel that our past is just as if it had never been, when we confess it and trust the blood of Christ for forgiveness, does not that past, which is now

justified, include marriages in our background? This focuses for us the question, what is a marriage in the sight of God? Whom God has joined together, let no man separate. That is a marriage in the sight of God.

Can we say that everybody who has signed a piece of paper is joined together by God? What is a marriage in the sight of God? And what should be the attitude of the church toward people who have had this sort of thing in their background before they came to faith and became part of the church? I think it's important for us to apply the law of God to these people after passing the law of God through the prism of the love of God. But once people are in Christ and on the mountaintop, remember, all of this teaching was given to disciples. Once people are in Christ, there should be no mistake about this.

Absolutely no mistake about this. Marriage is a relationship between a man and a woman based upon exclusiveness. It's an exclusive oneness, and it is until death parts them, except for marital unfaithfulness.

I believe this is the one condition upon which Jesus allows divorce. Again, remember what is going on here as he gives us verses 31 and 32. He is illustrating.

He is applying the difference between his approach to scripture and the approach to scripture of the religious establishment. He is showing to people who met with him at that first Christian retreat how to apply the word of God to their own lives and relationships, and then how to apply the word of God to the lives and relationships of other people. And we need to learn how to apply the word of God to others.

May God bless you. Amen. you

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