

Rightly Dividing the Gospels

—Installment 31—

The Sermon on the Mount

—Part 5—

The Distinctive Doctrines of Jesus:

Adultery

~ 28 A.D., after Passover

Near Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee

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I. Brief Review of Overview of the Sermon on the Mount

- A. We are treating Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount conjointly with Luke’s Sermon on the Plain
- B. Audience
 - 1. His disciples, whom he particularly addressed in a public setting among multitudes
 - a. That is, those whom he was preparing to receive and enter his kingdom
- C. Theme
 - 1. The kingdom and its distinctive qualities
 - a. The kingdom is shown to be composed of his (Messiah’s) subjects
 - i. Its distinctive traits derive from his character

II. Covered so far

- A. Beatitudes (Matt. 5: 3–12; Luke 6: 20–26)
- B. Salt and light..... (Matt. 5: 13–16)

III. Relationship of Jesus’ Doctrine to OT and Traditional Doctrine..... (Matt. 5: 17–48; Luke 6: 27–36)

- A. In Installment 29 we looked at the prefatory paragraph to his distinctive doctrines..... Matt. 5: 17–20
- B. We considered the meaning of Jesus’ declared purpose to fulfill the OT
 - 1. Fulfillment of the OT means satisfying its objective—leading to Christ and the NT
- C. We showed that he meant for his commands in this sermon to be applied to Christians..... vv. 19–20
 - 1. These commandments pertain to the subjects of the kingdom, i.e. Christians

- 2. Those given in this instructional phase could be obeyed without abrogating the OT law
 - i. Not all of Jesus' teaching during this phase was given in this context
 - (i) Addressing his disciples
 - (ii) Concerning the kingdom

IV. The Distinctive Doctrines of Jesus..... Matt. 5: 21–48

A. Murder.....21–26

- 1. Covered last installment
- 2. Jesus took an existing OT law and greatly amplified it for the NT
 - a. Not by adding detail and regulation
 - i. Those were in fact diminished somewhat: the cities of refuge and the avenger do not appear in NT law
 - b. Rather, he extended its scope and reach
 - i. He applies the law in the spiritual realm
 - ii. He identifies the sin at its lowest root; in that case, anger and contempt
 - (i) He gives three examples of morally suspect conditions and declares them subject to judgment
 - iii. He declares that sin begins in the heart and is already sin before it is outwardly expressed
- 3. The NT law is harder to obey than the OT

B. Adultery.....27–30

- 1. OT Doctrine
 - a. Thou shalt not commit adultery..... Ex. 20: 14; Deut. 5: 18
 - i. As with the previous instance regarding murder, the existing law was universally understood to apply only to the physical act
- 2. NT Doctrine
 - a. Whoever who looks on a woman to lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart
 - i. Jesus again makes the law greater
 - (i) He applies the law of adultery in the spiritual realm
 - (ii) He identifies the sin of adultery at its lowest root; in this case, sexual lust
 - 1. Lust, *ἐπιθυμῶ epithumeo*: longing desire or burning passion toward a forbidden thing
 - (iii) He declares that adultery, too, begins in the heart and is already sin before it is outwardly expressed
 - ii. Sexual ardor is not wrong
 - (i) It is God-given..... Gen. 2: 24
 - (ii) It is celebrated in scripture Song of Solomon

1. Prudery—treating sex as inherently shameful—is associated with Christianity, but it originates in human culture, not the Bible
 2. Even if you regard Song of Solomon as allegory, the frank and appreciative use of sexual imagery is undeniable
- (iii) It is reserved for the married and is pure in that context Heb. 13: 4
- (iv) The law forbids misdirected passion, called lust
- iii. Simple recognition of desirability is not wrong..... Song 6: 1 (also 1: 8 and 5: 9)
- (i) A man may find attractive a woman who is not his wife without lusting after her
 1. Just as he might appreciate another man’s car or house without coveting it
 - (ii) Lust must *conceive* to bring forth sin Jas. 1: 13–16
 1. Conceive, συλλαμβανω *sullambano*: to seize, as of a prisoner
 - a. Derived from λαμβανω *lambano*: to lay hold upon
 2. We conclude that Jesus’ doctrine refers to conceived lust, for he clearly means the condition developed unto sin
- iv. Lust is a morally suspect condition—commonly associated with sin—and is subject to judgment
- v. Q: How long may a man appreciate a woman before it becomes sin?
- (i) A: This must be a matter of conscience, but it surely cannot be prolonged or willful
 - (ii) It is at the point of seizure—captivity—that the sin occurs I Cor. 6: 12–13
 1. Pornography
 - a. Pornography’s intent is to stimulate sexual desire toward the actors or models
 - i. Can this be indulged without sin?
 - ii. A man might see it, recognize it, and move on with distaste or at least restraint; but if he seeks it, he renders himself captive
 - iii. A man using pornography pursues it with ardent passion as he would his wife
 - iv. Use of pornography is fornication (adultery for a married man).... II Pet. 2: 14
 2. Girl-watching (scanning crowds for attractive women)
 - a. Sexual predation, but restricted to looking and imagining
 - b. Can this be indulged without sin?
 - i. Even in the “conservative” 1950s, this was considered charmingly innocent: see Loesser’s *Standing on the Corner* (last page of outline)
 - ii. But is this not a willful seeking of captivity to lust?
- (iii) Flee fornication I Cor. 6: 18–20
- b. If your eye or hand causes you to sin, remove it and cast it away
- i. The forceful power of Jesus’ doctrine is shocking and even terrifying at times
 - (i) This is NT doctrine—given for obedience by Christians

ii. Must a Christian obey this command literally?

- (i) This is an extremely difficult question, vexing to Bible scholars and simple Christians alike

iii. I believe Jesus is teaching a high and profound principle, for which the out-plucked eye and severed hand serve as illustrative examples, to wit:

☞ *A Christian must break sin's bonds of captivity without shrinking from any necessary sacrifice.*

1. (That is not to say that we do it alone or without God's help; but do it we must)
2. The right eye and right hand were considered most precious among the members of the body

(ii) Principles and parables

1. Just previously, regarding murder, Jesus taught a high principle—the importance of reconciliation—with an illustration involving the soon-to-be-destroyed temple
 - a. The temple setting is illustrative, but ultimately incidental to the command
 - i. Jesus' commands are spiritually focused, and the physical details he chooses for illustration do not restrict the scope of his principles and commands
2. Jesus later will frequently use parables as a teaching device
 - a. A parable is a story in which the moral principles matter much more than the illustrative details

(iii) Apostolic example

1. Although we know of several sins committed by early Christians, including the apostles, we have no record of literal obedience to this command
 - a. Literal obedience “would turn the church into a hospital”

(iv) General cost-effectiveness

1. Removing the eye or hand would not actually solve the problem in most cases
 - a. Removing just the right eye, terrible sacrifice though it would be, would not render a man fully blind
 - b. A man without eyes may still lust after a woman based on what he hears or feels, or even what he remembers from when he still had eyes
 - c. A man without hands may still steal and kill

(v) The hand and eye are tools of the heart and mind

1. In heart and mind we must find release from captivity to sin
 - a. *He breaks the power of canceled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood availed for me.*
..... Charles Wesley, *O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing*, 1739
2. Painful sacrifice of cherished pleasure may be needed
 - a. And perhaps of things once considered necessary
 - i. E.g. internet access

- 3. Better to “blind” ourselves by refusing to look unto lust; to “maim” ourselves by refusing to approach unto sin
 - a. Perhaps taking steps to constrain our access to temptation
 - i. Compare blinders in horse tack
 - ii. Brother, do you fear God enough to “blind” yourself to pornography and girl-watching?
 - iv. Only in very rare circumstances would literal obedience be warranted; but his shocking language forces us to fearfully consider what we may be holding back from him
- c. It is better to lose one member than to go whole into hell
 - i. Again Jesus advances the notion of hell, expressed here again as Gehenna, to mean a terrifying destruction amid unending sin and suffering, not amenable to any mercy
 - ii. No pleasure—indeed, no gain of any sort—compares to the value of the soul Mark 8: 36
 - iii. Mortify concupiscence..... Col. 3: 5–6
 - (i) Concupiscence, *επιθυμία epithumia*: different inflection of same word translated *lust*
- 3. The NT law on adultery is very much harder to obey than the OT law
 - a. I would guess that a majority of our brethren have never committed physical adultery
 - b. But I would also guess that none have completely avoided the adultery of sexual lust
- 4. Jesus knows that his standard for Christian conduct is very high—indeed, Godlike—and that our obedience will be imperfect
 - a. But he also teaches us to overcome the old view of righteousness-by-law vv. 19–20
- C. Divorce and Remarriage..... next installment
- D. Oaths
- E. Resisting Evil
- F. Neighbors and Enemies

STANDING ON THE CORNER

From the show "The Most Happy Fella" (1956)
(Frank Loesser)

The Four Lads - 1956
Dean Martin - 1956
The King Brothers - 1960

Standing on the corner watching all the girls go by
Standing on the corner watching all the girls go by
Brother, you don't know a nicer occupation
Matter of fact, neither do I
Than standing on the corner watching all the girls
Watching all the girls, watching all the girls
Go by

I'm a cat that got the cream
Haven't got a girl, but I can dream
Haven't got a girl, but I can wish
So I take me down to Main Street and that's where I select my imaginary dish

Standing on the corner watching all the girls go by
Standing on the corner giving all the girls the eye
Brother, if you've got a rich imagination
Give it a whirl, give it a try
Try standing on the corner watching all the girls
Watching all the girls, watching all the girls
Go by

Saturday, and I'm so broke
Haven't got a girl, and that's no joke
Still I'm living like a millionaire
When I take me down to Main Street and I review the harem parading for me there

Standing on the corner watching all the girls go by
Standing on the corner underneath the springtime sky
Brother, you can't go to jail for what you're thinking
Or for the "Woo!" look in your eye
You're only standing on the corner watching all the girls
Watching all the girls, watching all the girls
Go by