

Sermon on the Mount Study Guide - Session 2 of 4

Matthew 5:21-48

Murder (Matt 5:21-26)

According to the New International Version Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, “The prohibition against murder was one of the cardinal commandments (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17). On multiple occasions, Jesus takes the details of the law to a deeper level. His concern is less about the specific act, and more about the condition of the heart. This perspective expands our translation of what is meant by the law.

Notice in verses 21 and 22, Jesus puts murder and unrighteous anger in the same category. How are they related? How does Jesus determine right from wrong?

The word *Raca* (vs. 22) in Aramaic is translated ‘empty’ or ‘stupid’ or ‘fool’. Why do you think insults such as these are equated to murder in God’s sight?

Why is Jesus concerned that reconciliation and apologies be made quickly?

Adultery (Matt 5:27-30)

In the same style as verses 21 and 22 regarding murder, Jesus addresses the topic of adultery. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart (vs 27-28).” The intent of the law could be translated as a directive to married people.

According to Jesus, however, the seventh commandment ‘You shall not commit adultery’ relates to the tenth commandment ‘You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.’ What is the full meaning of ‘You shall not commit adultery’?

In verses 29-30, Jesus is not suggesting that we literally mutilate our bodies. How do you think Jesus intends us to understand his warnings?

Divorce (Matthew 5:31-32)

According to the New International Version Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible,

“A certificate of divorce allowed a wife to remarry; the key element of such certificates was the phrase, ‘You are now free to marry another man.’

“One school of Pharisees (the school of Hillel) allowed divorce for any reason; the other (school of Shammai) allowed it only for ‘sexual immorality’. A legal divorce permitted remarriage, but without a valid divorce, a wife’s new marriage was invalid, hence adulterous. (In a Jewish legal setting the wife’s divorce was more at issue than the husband’s because Jewish law in principle permitted men to have multiple wives.) Jesus here depicts divorce as invalid, apart from the partner’s infidelity. Because Jesus often used graphic hyperbole, this may be a case to graphically reinforce the point, a warning against breaking one’s marriage.”

Read Matthew 19:3-9. Rabbi Shammai taught that divorce was permitted only in extreme cases. Rabbi Hillel taught that it was permitted for any and every reason. How does this help us to understand the Pharisees’ “test” question in Matthew 19:3?

Jesus points back to Genesis. What does this teach us about God’s original design for marriage (Matthew 19:4-6)?

The Pharisees refer to Moses’ instructions about divorce as a “command” (v. 7). What does Jesus’ reply teach us about divorce (v. 8)?

Oaths (Matthew 5:33-37)

The Pharisees had elaborate formulas for oaths, with some being binding and some not (see Matthew 23:16-22). Why is Jesus opposed to oaths?

Why should oaths be unnecessary for Jesus’ followers?

Eye for Eye (Matthew 5:38-42)

The real test of love does not come in how we relate to the kind and loveable but in how we relate to the cruel and despicable. Jesus' quotation of 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth' comes from Exodus 21:24. *"But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise."*

"Anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in the same manner: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The one who has inflicted the injury must suffer the same injury." Leviticus 24:19-20

Christ's words in the Sermon on the Mount are both most admired and most resented. He calls us to show our attitude of total love to an 'evil' person.

Referencing the Old Testament laws, how do Jesus' words clarify the meaning of justice?

What do you find most difficult about Jesus' instructions in these verses?

Love for Enemies (Matthew 5:43-48)

Nowhere is the challenge of the Sermon greater. Nowhere is the distinctness of the Christian counterculture more obvious. Nowhere is our need of the power of the Holy Spirit (whose first fruit is love) more compelling.

According to Jesus, how are we to treat our enemies and why?

Who are our enemies?

How was Jesus himself an example of the principles "Do not resist an evil person" and "Love your enemies"?