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Exceeding Righteousness and Our Passions; Matt 5:21-32

GPBC

10.21.18

Introduction – Beginning with v21 throughout the rest of chapter five, Jesus is giving 6 illustrations of the statement that He made in v20. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. There is a vast difference between how a false righteousness and a true righteousness understand the law of God, so much so that one's eternal destiny is at stake. Then, He proceeds to provide 6 illustrations of the difference between false and true righteousness in vv21-48.

Now you'll notice that at the beginning of each illustration Jesus will say something like "You have heard it said" and then He'll state the common Pharisaical understanding and application of the law. Next He says, "But I say to you" and it is there where He unpacks how true righteousness approaches the Law of God. Jesus is not pitting His teaching against the OT moral Law. He's just affirmed in v17 that He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. No, He is confronting how Pharisaical righteousness has misused the Law of God in order to promote their own righteousness and excuse their own sin.

This is the issue. Pharisaical righteousness (or moralism) will take parts of the Law of God and even add their own rules to it so that they can boast in keeping the Law, and being good, righteous people. See, I've kept these rules. I'm a good moral person. While simultaneously overlooking and excusing their own sin and even twisting and quoting Scripture to do so.

The law was never meant as simply a list of rules to keep. It was meant to condition the heart. It's not just what the Law states that matters. It's all that's connected with it. True faith is not just mere outward conformity. True faith is a condition of the heart that yields a life of obedience to God. Again, it's loving God and loving others that fulfills the 10 Commandments.

Here's how Pharisaical righteousness plays out in real life. The law of God is You shall not murder and you shall not commit adultery. I'm not going to murder and I'm not going to commit adultery, but anything short of that is fair game. True righteousness says if murder and adultery offend God, then anything that leads

me down the path to murder and adultery also offends God, and I desire to present my whole life as worship to my Lord. Pleasing Him is what pleases me. Today's text addresses our passions, and Lord willing, next week our attitudes.

- I. How Exceeding Righteousness Deals with Anger (vv21-26)
  - a. If the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment is "You shall not murder," why are we talking about anger? Because anger leads to murder. Hatred and animosity toward another leads to the unlawful taking of life.
  - b. The Pharisee would say as long as I don't kill anyone, I'm right with God. It doesn't really matter the thoughts I have against someone or the things I say about or even to someone so long as I don't kill them.
  - c. Jesus says that's a good example of pharisaical righteousness that will never enter the kingdom of heaven. It does matter what we think or say about someone. It does matter if we hold bitterness and anger towards someone. It does matter if we refuse to forgive. It does matter if we slander and gossip. Why? Because a heart filled with hatred is just as out of step with God as the act of murder.
  - d. In fact, if we have a bitter, mean, hateful spirit toward another, that is indicative of the lack of true faith. V22
    - i. 6:14-15
  - e. So how does true faith deal with hurt and anger and bitterness? Jesus gives 2 illustrations in vv23-26.
    - i. True faith seeks reconciliation. True faith seeks to make things right. True faith seeks forgiveness, to forgive and be forgiven. True faith takes the initiative.
    - ii. True faith knows you can't be right with God if you're not right with your brother. You can't love God if you hate your brother. 1 John
  - f. You see, the Law of God was not meant to be just a check on our actions, but a check on our heart.
    - i. Matthew 15:16-20
  - g. Are you holding a grudge? Are you bitter towards someone? You wouldn't dream of doing them harm, but you wouldn't mind if harm came their way. Ask God to soften your heart and seek reconciliation and forgiveness. That's the way of true righteousness.
- II. How Exceeding Righteousness Deals with Lust (vv27-30)

- a. Pharisaical righteousness says as long as I do not commit adultery then anything else I do sexually is permitted.
- b. Jesus says a lustful eye indicates a lustful heart. When it comes to sexual immorality it matters not only what we do but also what we think, watch, say, and fantasize. Pharisaical righteousness wants to know how close I can get to the line without crossing it. Pharisaical righteousness says I can sow my wild oats and do as I please until I get married and then I'll worry about sexual purity. Pharisaical righteousness says as long as I'm not hurting anyone it's ok.
  - i. Let's just expose that lie now. Any time we practice sexual immorality, whether it be with someone or by ourselves viewing pornography, we are not only hurting ourselves, we are hurting the ones we sin with, the ones we view on a screen, and everyone else in our lives.
  - ii. Sexual immorality will destroy your life, your marriage, your future marriage, your family, your children, your friends, your church, unbelievers that know you go to church – everyone! And even worse, if left unchecked and unrepentant, lust will eventually and finally destroy your soul.
  - iii. Ill. prostitute
- c. So how does true faith deal with a lustful heart? Jesus again gives two illustrations in vv29-30.
  - i. We know Jesus is not calling for self-mutilation here. He's teaching us that sexual immorality is so dangerous and carries such heavy consequences and is able to destroy your soul, do whatever it takes to get it out of your life and heart! Drastic consequences call for drastic measures!
  - ii. Rid your life of anything that is leading you down the path of lust. Stop watching those movies. Throw your laptop, I-pad, and smartphone in the dumpster. Get away from the person you're having an affair with. Stop flirting with and sexting that person now.
  - iii. Oh it's not going to be easy. Lust has an insatiable appetite. It might be painful. It might feel like you've chopped off a limb or gouged out an eye, but if you don't get rid of what causes you to stumble now, you will destroy yourself with your sin.

- iv. It's better, it's so much better to do the hard thing now than it will be to reap the consequences of lust for an eternity.
- v. False righteousness will make excuses for sin. True righteousness will deal with sin.
- vi. You think that secret addiction to pornography is not hurting you – your soul shrivels a little more every time you click on!
- d. Loving God, loving your neighbor, loving your spouse, loving your fiancé, loving your future spouse means keeping yourself pure.

### III. Why Jesus Discusses Divorce as an Illustration of Exceeding Righteousness (vv31-32)

- a. Jesus is not bringing up an additional topic of divorce here. This is not a sermon about divorce. That comes later in Matthew 19. Jesus is still addressing adultery and lust by exposing how the Pharisees have twisted the OT law on divorce.
- b. V31 is citing Deut 24:1. Over in Matthew 19, Jesus sets the record straight by saying the only reason Moses allowed divorce was because of the hardness of your heart. In other words, sin is at the bottom of divorce. Divorce is not God's desire. Deut 24:1 was given so women would not be mistreated by an unloving husband and could remarry so as to have provision and protection.
- c. The Pharisees had twisted Deut 24:1 in order to satisfy their lust. Indecency came to mean anything that a husband did not like whether that be desire or expectations or even cooking. In other words, Pharisaical righteousness applied divorce to what we in our day term "irreconcilable differences," "falling out of love," and "no fault divorce."
- d. Jesus confronts the way pharisaical righteousness twists the law of God to satisfy our own sinful hearts! If you divorce for any other reason than sexual immorality, you are actually committing adultery, forcing your former spouse to commit adultery, and whoever marries you or them to commit adultery. Your marriage is not over in God's sight just because you have a piece of paper!
- e. Marriage is sacred and holy. And to use the law of God as a cover up for your lust is nothing short of adultery.

Conclusion – Pharisaical righteousness is that dangerous, slippery, convincing check-box faith that says as long as I don't do any of these things, anything else goes! True righteousness says that my greatest joy is found in loving God and loving others. I'm not out to see how much I can sin and get by with it. I'm out to see how much I can glorify God with my whole life!