

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 17, Chapter 5 Continued 5

We've been in Matthew chapter 5 long enough that a reminder of the setting and background for the Sermon on the Mount is in order.

The setting is the Galilee. It is the serene rural agricultural and shepherding center of the Holy Land. Above the Sea of Galilee, which was somewhat larger then than it is today, are gentle rolling hills covered with mustard plants, poppies, and a variety of grasses and small bushes. The trees are few and not large. Somewhere in those hills a crowd of thousands of Jews gathered, mostly the common folk, from places as far away as Syria. Why did they come? What drew them there? It was to encounter Yeshua. Was it a religious encounter they sought? Not in the sense we moderns think of it. In that era what we would call "religion" was not separated and compartmentalized away from all other aspects of their lives. A god or a spirit always was involved in whatever activity was occurring. These thousands of Jews, however, did not come because they thought they were going to meet their Messiah.

CJB Matthew 4:23-5:2 ²³ Yeshua went all over the Galil teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom, and healing people from every kind of disease and sickness. ²⁴ Word of him spread throughout all Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill, suffering from various diseases and pains, and those held in the power of demons, and epileptics and paralytics; and he healed them. ²⁵ Huge crowds followed him from the Galil, the Ten Towns, Yerushalayim, Y'hudah, and 'Ever-HaYarden.

CJB Matthew 5:1 *Seeing the crowds, Yeshua walked up the hill. After he sat*

down, his talmidim came to him, ² and he began to speak. This is what he taught them:

So the people came in the hope of healing of their physical ailments. The teaching they would receive was a bonus.

Likely the place was near to Capernaum because that was where Yeshua was currently residing. At this time the Jewish people looked upon Jesus as a **Tzadik**, a Holy Man that was a miracle working healer. A **Tzadik** would come along every now and then without warning. These men could indeed actually heal in the name and power of the Lord God of Israel. So when a Holy Man appeared the sick and the lame would flock to him.

Christ had not yet publicly revealed His divine nature nor His mission as the Messiah that had been foretold in the Jewish Bible, the **Tanakh**. I use the term "Bible" in a loose way. Jews did not own or carry around a neatly bound holy book as we do in our time. For one reason, the various books of the Old Testament were written down on rather bulky scrolls. Since each precious word had to be copied and re-copied by hand, there were few Jews that had such ability or authority to do so, and it was rare that even a well-to-do person might possess much more than a single book of the Bible. Therefore actual Scripture teaching occurred only at the local Synagogue (where many could hear it at one time), and even then Scripture teaching took a backseat to the teachings of the Traditions of the Elders that the Pharisees who dominated the Synagogues advocated and insisted upon.

As His speech to the crowd began, Yeshua first acknowledged who was present in a series of blessings. Next He paused and made a crucial statement.... a sort of preamble.... prior to the remainder of His teaching. There He cautioned in a kind of pre-emptive strike that in no way should anyone think that what He would say abolished, changed, added to or subtracted from the Law and the Prophets (that term was shorthand for the entire **Tanakh**.... what we call the Old Testament). In wanting to be certain that He was not going to be misunderstood or misrepresented, He elaborated by saying that not even one letter in one word of the Scriptures would be abolished or changed until the present heavens and earth passed away. And further that anyone who disobeyed any part of the Holy Scriptures (the Law, specifically), and taught others to do so, would be eternally relegated to the lowest possible rung of society and status in the Kingdom of Heaven. Afterwards He began to teach, often by stating one or another of the 10

Commandments and explaining that while doing them was still required, the intent and mental attitude that a worshipper approached in observing the commandment was every bit as important as the action itself.

Reconciliation rather than revenge or even a lawsuit was Christ's instruction in various situations from having anger towards someone to the matter of collecting an unpaid debt. We left off at verse 26, so open your Bibles to verse 27.

READ MATTHEW 5:27 - end

I want to remind you of something I said from an earlier lesson. Yes, we are crawling through these verses at a pace that would make a snail seem like Secretariat. The reason is that the Jewish cultural understanding that goes without saying of those in attendance, an understanding that is embedded within Yeshua's words, is not usually known to us in the West in the 21st century. That cultural understanding provides the needed context for extracting correct meaning from Christ's statements. Therefore for us to grasp the meaning and intent, and to apply it properly to our lives, we must be open minded and willing to invest our time to be instructed in the ways and customs of that ancient and foreign civilization.

Yeshua quotes Exodus 20:14, the 7th Commandment: thou shall not commit adultery. This commandment is the proverbial "can of worms" since its giving at Mt. Sinai. It is a direct commandment concerning sexual behavior, and the operation of morality within it. And since the command is brief, later Moses will give further instruction on it. Today, in a time when even the fundamental concept of morality is questioned (even angrily rejected by some), sexual behavior has become little more than a playground of pleasure seeking with nearly no boundaries whatsoever. It is not unusual for those who seek such pleasures to argue about what the Bible says regarding it, and they enjoy reminding Christians that the Church long ago threw away the laws of God and replaced it with Jesus and love. So the conclusion is that this 7th Commandment, and all the offshoots that stem from it, no longer matters because Jesus did away with those ancient sexual limitations. If you want to know why sexual immorality is now the norm in the West, simply look to the pulpit. It is Christian leaders and commentators who are responsible for creating this avalanche of sex sin due to their tolerance of anything and everything, false doctrines and denials of plain biblical truth.

Understanding what this 7th commandment means and entails requires some

explanation before we get into how Yeshua dealt with it. So before we get to the second part of Christ's instruction about it, I want to draw heavily from the teaching I did on Exodus 20:14 some years ago.

The 7th Commandment is that a married person should not commit adultery. The first thing to understand is that the entire concept of adultery, by definition, **ONLY** occurs within the institution of a marriage; outside of a marriage, adultery has no meaning. Marriage is not only an important element of God's plan **for** mankind, but it plays a role in God's relationship **with** mankind.

The fundamental concept of a marriage is that a "union" occurs; as concerns human-to-human relationships, scripturally speaking, this marriage union is between a man and a woman. Let me say that again: there is no provision for same sex marriage in the Bible. In fact, such a notion is an oxymoron. While we too often think of marriage as a physical or sexual matter, or in our American society as a financial or legal matter, in fact the union God is dealing with in the 7th Commandment is first and foremost a spiritual union. Certainly in the present world the physical aspects of marriage exist, and not the least of reasons for it is the propagation of our species. From Yehoveh's perspective, the sin of adultery is less about a husband or a wife having a physical sexual union outside of their marriage than it is about our **spirits** entering into an unauthorized union with another. God has authorized that a man and a woman, before Him, may be joined in every level of union between themselves; but **ONLY** between themselves. The only other union allowed within that marriage is with God.

You've probably noticed that our union with Christ is often spoken of in the Bible using marriage terminology; and its use is both metaphorical and real. That fact should help us to be more aware of how we are to consider the essence of marriage from Yehoveh's point of view, and how we are to consider the nature of our relationship with Christ. Just as earthly marriage is meant to be a man and a woman coming into union with one another, Salvation is humanity's union with Christ.

We who are Christ's are, figuratively speaking, currently in a state of betrothal to Him. We are in the marriage **PROCESS**. Right now, Christ is with us in Spirit, and so we are in union with Him in spirit. But there will be a time in the future when we will be in union with him in a much more tangible and complete way. So even during our current earthly time of betrothal to Christ for us to come into union with something or someone that is forbidden is to place us into a state of

unfaithfulness to Christ. This, therefore, puts us in a state of adultery in our relationship with Christ.

The NT Greek word “**moichos**” (moy-kos), which is typically correctly translated “adultery”, must be understood in its OT Hebrew sense in order for us to fully understand what God is telling us about adultery. When the Hebrews spoke of adultery they meant unfaithfulness to your union partner. It did NOT have to be an overt act of having sex with another person to be considered adultery, although most often that is what occurred. What constituted adultery, and the proper proofs and punishments for it, changed considerably over time. During the time of the Patriarchs, adultery required the wife to have had sex with another man. No proof other than the husband’s suspicions were needed, and he himself could put her to death. The Laws of Moses brought the requirement for conviction to a minimum of two witnesses. By the time of Christ much more proof was needed, a court of law would rule on the matter, and death was still one of a range of possible punishments. Not long AFTER Christ, the death penalty was removed for the sin of adultery because it had become so rampant within Jewish society that it was almost impossible to police; and the number of women that would have been executed was so large as to make carrying out the death sentence unthinkable. During all biblical times, adultery was considered primarily a female crime and sin....men were usually not subject to it.

There are certain unions available to mankind that we are prohibited from entering into, especially if we wish to also be in union with Christ. In other words there are some unions that are mutually exclusive. An extreme example would be that if we come into spiritual union with Satan, we can not also be in spiritual union with Christ...those two unions being mutually exclusive. There are other forbidden unions, all of them destructive. So we need to understand the serious nature of this particular sin in a much broader context than we typically think of it.

In Matthew 5:27 and 28, Yeshua essentially explains how adultery comes about. It is that it always begins in the mind as the product of our evil inclination. If one first doesn't fantasize about it and embrace the idea, it doesn't happen. Therefore when married men eye other women in a lustful way, then Yeshua says that from God's perspective the act of adultery has already occurred (the thought being that embracing the idea inevitably leads to the doing of it). The God-principle is that just as anger is the initiating cause of murder, so is lust the initiating cause of adultery. Especially in the 21st century pornography is perhaps the number one expression of lust in the lives of males; married or otherwise. There can be no

intellectually honest defense of the use of pornography as anything other than immoral lusting and therefore it is sin. And there is no doubt that the widespread use of pornography has ignited the epidemic of adultery in our society. Yet I want to be clear: the notion being spoken by Christ that the intention is to be considered as the deed was nothing new or novel among Jews. The Academy of Shammai, which represents the source of doctrine for one of the two greatest factions of the Pharisees at the time of Jesus, also taught this same principle.

Although Yeshua quoted from, and is discussing, the 7th Commandment His instruction about adultery actually approaches the matter through the worldview of the 10th Commandment: do not covet. That is, coveting is a sinful state of mind. Coveting is a sinful intention. It is the desire to obtain something forbidden. Coveting is not the action itself. Thus it is the disobedience to the 10th Commandment (when the intent occurs) that ushers in the disobedience to the 7th Commandment (when the actual physical deed of adultery occurs).

Yeshua continues to expand on this matter of intention leading to the doing of the sin in verses 29 and 30. So verse 28 speaks of "looking upon a woman" (coveting), and verse 29 says that even if it is your right eye that you are using to "look", then you should gouge it out and get rid of it. In Jewish thought the right side of anything is the best side, or the strongest side, so it is the most valuable side. Therefore it is not only that you lose your eye, you lose your best eye. Naturally this is an expression because unless you have damaged eyes, for most people our two eyes see equally well. And why should someone who is prone to lusting after women gouge out their best eye? Because it is better to lose that eye than it is to have our entire body thrown into **Gei-Hinnom** and destroyed.

Even if one doesn't know what **Gei-Hinnom** is, it sounds like a really bad thing that nobody wants to have happen to them. Many translations will use the word "hell". That isn't exactly wrong, but it certainly isn't right. **Gei-Hinnom** is a valley that runs through the south of Jerusalem; today it is simply called the Hinnom Valley. In Yeshua's era it was Jerusalem's municipal garbage dump. Jerusalem was a city with several thousand people living there. As you might imagine, they generated tons of trash: animal carcasses, human waste, items that became unclean through contact with blood or other body fluids that saturated them, and so on. Every filthy and disgusting thing you can think of was thrown into this valley. The refuse was then lit on fire and the fires burned continually, night and day, while sulfur was thrown onto it to try and disguise the nauseating odors.

It is well documented that in prior times this same valley was used for the same purposes, but it was also used by the Canaanites for human sacrifice; often children. The dead bodies of the murdered were simply thrown into the burning waste. So it is easily seen that the threat of sinning a sin that could cause you to be thrown into **Gei-Hinnom** was about the worst punishment imaginable. It is true that the idea of Hell, a place of fire and torment for the dead, was associated with **Gei-Hinnom**. But Hell was viewed as an underworld place where the wicked dead lived; Judeo-Christianity would say it is a spiritual place of evil. **Gei-Hinnom** in the 1st century was as real and tangible as it gets. In Christ's day it wasn't evil; but it was unclean and frighteningly disgusting.

I suppose Christ's instruction that plucking your eye out and discarding it as a good solution to lust can only be labeled in modern Western terms as exaggeration and hyperbole because He certainly wasn't suggesting self mutilation. The point was to illustrate just how serious of a sin adultery is, and that since the fuel of adultery is lust (coveting), and the source of that fuel was what was taken in through the portal of the eye, then one should make every effort to avoid it even if it means destroying that portal.

Notice that Yeshua is talking to the men. Remember: in His day adultery was seen in Jewish society as primarily a crime committed by women; men were largely exempt. So this teaching was a battering ram to challenge and to smash this false doctrine that so favored males. Ironically it is men who are really tempted the most by lust because men are visually oriented creatures. This is why pornography is such a great and destructive temptation for men. It will never stop being a temptation as long as it exists. And men, don't ever think you'll be the one who can use pornography for whatever your reason, but that it won't inevitably lead you to wrong sexual behavior because you are uniquely able to resist it. It is no different than the person who believes they can use cocaine or crack and they'll be the one who will avoid becoming addicted. Is using pornography a sin? Of course it is because it is lusting (coveting) after women who are not your wife. And yes, single men, it is similar for you. It is lust and the fantasizing it produces that leads to wrong sexual behavior. Once again: lust is coveting. And it is exactly what Jesus is warning about.

In verse 30 Christ adds to the dramatic hyperbole by saying that if your right hand makes you sin, cut it off (just as it is with a lustful eye). Once again the meaning of "right" is "best" hand. While the eye is the portal to the invisible mind, the hand is representative of the visible physical part of us that carries out what the mind

instructs the body to do. In another setting, while with His disciples, Yeshua repeats this same principle using similar illustrations in Matthew chapter 18.

^{CJB} Matt. 18:9 ⁹ *And if your eye is a snare for you, gouge it out and fling it away! Better that you should be one-eyed and obtain eternal life than keep both eyes and be thrown into the fire of Gei-Hinnom.*

Christ moves on to the next subject in verse 31 but it is not altogether detached from the subject of verses 27-30. The subject is divorce, but it includes the possibility that under certain circumstances divorce can cause the woman to become an adulteress; and anyone who marries her then becomes a participant in her adultery, which makes them an adulterer as well. I want to pause here to comment that in the Bible, especially so in the Old Testament but it is also the case in the New Testament, it is men who divorce their wives (not the other way around), and it is the women who generally bear the blame and any punishment involved. We must take this in the context of that era. It was a society that was male dominated to a degree that Western women in the 21st century have not experienced. Jewish women at that time were not chattel; but they also had little power. By custom the lives of women were in the hands of men. Therefore when Yeshua speaks of divorce it is of course a man divorcing his wife. And, says Jesus, the only reason a man could legitimately, and without consequence, divorce his wife is if she has been unfaithful to him (notice there is no thought of the man being unfaithful to his wife, which in reality had a much higher probability of happening).

Yeshua's entire treatment of divorce finds its original source in the Torah in Deuteronomy 24.

^{CJB} Deuteronomy 24:1 *"Suppose a man marries a woman and consummates the marriage but later finds her displeasing, because he has found her offensive in some respect. He writes her a divorce document, gives it to her and sends her away from his house. ² She leaves his house, goes and becomes another man's wife; ³ but the second husband dislikes her and writes her a get, gives it to her and sends her away from his house; or the second husband whom she married dies. ⁴ In such a case her first husband, who sent her away, may not take her again as his wife, because she is now defiled. It would be detestable to ADONAI, and you are not to bring about sin in the land ADONAI your God is giving you as your inheritance.*

Deuteronomy deals with some nuances within a divorce situation, making divorce an undesirable, but not illegal, occurrence. Yeshua doesn't overturn it or change it. He merely makes the case that divorce shouldn't happen in the first place. But if it does, the only legitimate reason for a man to divorce his wife is her unfaithfulness to him. Matthew's description of Christ's words are (frankly) not easy to interpret. I believe that there are two main reasons for this difficulty. First, I suspect there is some kind of textual corruption of the Greek manuscripts that are oldest ones we have. Second there are some unspoken cultural customs that the people of that era went by, but we aren't familiar with. If we take what is said perfectly literally, then basically we have Christ saying that a woman who is divorced by her husband is automatically guilty of adultery. That she becomes an adulteress is said to be caused by her husband. This hardly seems reasonable if for no other reason it does not adhere to the basic God-principle that we are each responsible only for our own sins and not those of others. In the case of a divorce involving a woman who had remained faithful to her husband, the wife had little to no say in the matter and certainly wasn't the party to cause the divorce or to initiate it. This situation doesn't jibe with Deuteronomy. There a divorced woman is not in any way labeled an adulteress simply because her husband decides to divorce her.

Further Christ's words are that if the divorced woman gets remarried, then her new husband also becomes guilty of adultery. Deuteronomy in no way puts such a conviction of adultery upon a divorced woman's new husband. It is well known, historically, that divorce ran rampant in the 1st century Jewish community. Men would frivolously divorce their wives, go and have a quick affair with another woman, and then come back and remarry the same woman..... sometimes in a matter of a few days. This was because the way that the Law of Moses was interpreted by many of the Rabbis was that the man could technically avoid the sin of adultery (a sin within a marriage) by first divorcing his wife before he had that brief tryst with another woman. And because a man divorcing his wife was not labeled as sin for the husband in the Law, then he was home free. Could it be that this was the background for Yeshua's words? I think it is a definite possibility. Most everything we read in the Bible, including the New Testament and Christ's words, were in the setting and circumstances of the times. The only other possibility in my mind is that Yeshua was saying that divorce and remarriage destroy the concept of lifelong monogamy. So no amount of rules about divorce, no matter how fair, change the fact that the underlying meaning of marriage in the first place is a permanent bond between a man and a woman. However I think even that is a bit of a stretch and not something His audience would have

taken from that instruction.

In verse 33 it seems as though Yeshua leaves the subject of the 10 Commandments and gets into some other standard rules of Jewish society. However buried in it is a reference to another of the 10 Commandments. Nearly every Bible version has its own unique translation of Christ's words because the interpretation is a bit difficult. The CJB version, and few others, use both the words vow and oath and so some commentators try to approach this verse on the basis of distinguishing between the meaning of a vow versus an oath. However in most settings in the Bible, the distinction between vow and oath is paper thin. For all practical purposes the words are interchangeable. I think the YLT is the best of the bunch.

^{YLT} Matthew 5:33 *'Again, ye heard that it was said to the ancients: Thou shalt not swear falsely, but thou shalt pay to the Lord thine oaths;*

Whenever a person "swore" something meant that the person was certifying the truthfulness and veracity of a statement or a transaction, but the swearing by nature involved invoking the name of that person's god. Therefore among Jews to swear something meant to invoke Yehoveh's name as the guarantor of whatever the statement or transaction was. This was absolutely in line with a command of God given in the Torah.

^{CJB} Leviticus 19:12 *Do not swear by my name falsely, which would be profaning the name of your God; I am ADONAI.*

This gets fleshed out a bit further a little later in the Torah.

^{CJB} Numbers 30:2-3 ² *Then Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of the people of Isra'el. He said, "Here is what ADONAI has ordered: ³ when a man makes a vow to ADONAI or formally obligates himself by swearing an oath, he is not to break his word but is to do everything he said he would do.*

But Yeshua says not to swear at all, not even if you are NOT using God's name. That is, don't swear by anything..... not by Heaven, not by the earth, and not by Jerusalem. Heaven is God's created place where His throne is located. Not by the earth because it is God's created place and is said in Isaiah 66 that it is His property.... His footstool to be specific. And not by Jerusalem because it is the city of the great King (a reference to God's created earthly dwelling place). All this

seems logical within the religious sphere, doesn't it? All these things (Heaven, earth, Jerusalem) are part of God's realm and so they have a firm relationship to God. But then Yeshua says not to swear also by your head. Clearly your head isn't part of God's realm. In the Mishna, generally speaking the rule was that oaths sworn by Heaven, earth, even the Temple are not valid.

Yeshua goes on to say rather than swearing an oath, just make your yes, yes... and your no, no. In fact, He says that to do anything more has its origin in evil. Those last few words, especially, are what have caused all sorts of various opinions about exactly what Yeshua was instructing. Frankly, the main problem for the many denominations in deciding what to do with this statement has to do with the first and foremost doctrine of the Christian Church: the Old Testament, along with its rules, laws, instructions, prohibitions, etc., are dead and gone so there is no point in looking to it for answers. That false doctrine causes needless confusion in understanding this matter.

First of all, there is no prohibition against making vows and oaths in the Torah or anywhere in the Old Testament. And, at least the early Church that was organized and operated out of synagogues, and administered mostly by Jewish Believers, never understood Jesus as no longer allowing vows. Even the Apostle Paul felt obligated to fulfill a vow such that he ventured to Jerusalem and the Temple to do so. Since Yeshua made it abundantly clear in Matthew 5:17 - 19 that nothing He would say was in any way meant to be taken that He was abolishing, changing, adding to or subtracting from not only the Torah but the entire **Tanakh** (Old Testament) then that must always be our point of reference when trying to interpret His statements.

Just as marriage and divorce had become frivolous within Jewish society during Christ's era, so was making frivolous vows that the vow maker had no intent of actually following through with. It had just become a manner of speech. We do that in our time by saying things like "with God as my witness" or "the Lord knows". This is using the Lord's name as the guarantor of what it is you are claiming..... in other words you are making an oath or vow even if you didn't realize it (that is the nature of frivolous). And that violates the 3rd Commandment: thou shall not take the name of the Lord in vain. Again; is it wrong to make an oath or vow in God's name? No. But God absolutely expects us to do what we vowed or that we know our claim was true. Otherwise we have used His name in a vain way.

At the same time God doesn't command us to make an oath or vow to prove our truthfulness or our intent. However as we learn when reading in Judges about the tragedy of Jephthah's innocent daughter, making a frivolous or careless vow that we can't or don't carry out can have disastrous unintended consequences or it can remain as an Albatross around our neck. Christ's viewpoint is: don't make vows and oaths at all. One more time: by nature, in the biblical era, vows and oaths automatically included invoking a god's name. So we must understand vows and oaths in that context. In a legitimate religious setting, such as a marriage ceremony, of course it is proper to make a vow. But in a typical daily social setting, or a business transaction.... stay clear. Don't back up your "yes" by invoking God's name. Don't back up your "no" by invoking God's name. Being truthful is enough..... especially for a follower of Christ.

This issue about Jesus saying that going any further than "yes" or "no" has its origin in evil is clearly addressing a cultural and societal issue of that time (which we've already discussed) because making a legitimate vow or oath in God's name is in no way evil. But... it can be fraught with danger for the one making the vow.

We'll stop here for today and finally conclude Matthew 5 next time.