

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Arrival: A Study of Matthew 1–7

STUDY FIFTEEN

Whatever Happened to Fidelity and Honesty?

Matthew 5:27–37

Truth is the most powerful thing on the planet. When we live in it, we have no skeletons. We have no fears. We have nothing to be found out. We sleep well. We die with a clear conscience. No elaborate verbiage; just tell the truth.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

JESUS opened His Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes—eight world-changing declarations about humility, piety, mercy, purity, gentleness, seeking what's right, and living in peace. Armed with these qualities, those who follow Christ influence culture as “salt” and “light.” We trailblaze a higher ethical standard than the world, and by being different we make a difference.

Broadly speaking, the Beatitudes embody the moral values of the kingdom of God. As we saw in our previous studies, Jesus presented these kingdom values *not* to replace the laws of the Old Testament but to express them in their truest sense so that His followers could obey God's Word as God meant it to be obeyed.

As we learned in the previous study, truly obeying the sixth command of the Ten Commandments, “You must not murder” (Matthew 5:21), means more than refraining from homicide. It includes resisting anger in all its forms—hatred, name-calling, disdain, contempt, revenge. How do we solve the murder problem in our streets? By resolving the anger problem in our hearts.

From Jesus' point of view, the roots of a poisonous plant are just as deadly as the fruit because they feed the fruit. He taught us to deal with sin at the germination stage and to cultivate a deeper kind of righteousness that comes from a changed heart.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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Continuing this theme of heart change, Jesus picked up the seventh commandment: “You must not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14). Let’s join Jesus as He digs up the sin at the root of marital infidelity and discover the blessings of relationships in the kingdom of God.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you prepare to study God’s Word, reflect on Jesus’ sixth beatitude, “God blesses those whose hearts are pure” (Matthew 5:8). Our relationships flourish when our hearts are pure—free from deceit, cleansed from impure thoughts, and unbound by selfishness. Ask the Lord to purify your heart as you receive His Word.

Father, illumine me through Jesus’ teaching on fidelity and honesty in my closest relationships. Refine my motives, reinforce my commitments, and purify my heart so that all my relationships reflect Your faithful love. In Jesus’ name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Matthew 5:27–37* and notice the three times these phrases repeat, “You have heard” and “But I say” (Matthew 5:27–28, 31–32, 33–34). On these phrases hangs Jesus’ teaching about three sensitive issues: *adultery*, *divorce*, and *breaking vows*. Before diving into the details, reflect on the subjects as a collective. Do any common themes link these issues? If you see some, write them in the space below.



Observation: Marital Fidelity and Verbal Integrity

Use your skills of observation to examine our passage closely. Imagine yourself as a detective with a magnifying glass in hand, looking at the details of the passage and searching for the smallest clues that may unlock the meaning of the text.¹

Let’s group the issues of adultery and divorce under one heading: *Marital Fidelity*.



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Marital Fidelity—Matthew 5:27–32

The Pharisees strictly abided by the Mosaic law's prohibition of adultery. They cruelly condemned adulterers and sentenced them to be stoned—such as the adulterous woman they brought before Jesus (John 8:1–11). Jesus also took seriously the sin of adultery, but He went beyond the letter to reveal the heart of the law.

Adultery and Lust

What did He say about adultery in *Matthew 5:28*? Who was just as worthy of condemnation as an adulterer? How do you think His followers would have responded to His teaching?

Jesus redrew the line of sin to include not only the act but also the thoughts that might lead to the act. The central question on Jesus' mind was “Do we *want* to commit adultery?” Just as He said anger is murder in the heart, Jesus taught that lust is adultery in the heart. Righteousness in God's kingdom comes from the inside out.

Like a compassionate physician who cares about our total health, Jesus addressed our disease at its source rather than wait for its symptoms to surface. What was Jesus' treatment plan for dealing with lust, according to *5:29–30*?

Jesus wasn't saying that we should literally pluck out our eye or cut off our hand. Rather, He was telling His followers to do whatever it takes to stop lust at the eye-gate, the point where it enters our hearts.



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With our eyes, we may desire a person other than our spouse. With our hands, we may touch someone inappropriately and enflame lust. In the application section, we'll discuss practical ways to guard ourselves against lust and keep our hearts pure.

Jesus was ruthless in dealing with lust! The only way to be ruthless is to use extreme language that gets our attention. Plucking out an eye was His way of saying, "Stop staring at another woman." As Job stated in Job 31:1, "I made a covenant with my eyes / not to look with lust at a young woman." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Adultery and Divorce

The topic of adultery led Jesus to the subject of divorce as it relates to adultery. What do you observe in His teaching in [Matthew 5:31–32](#)? Read [Deuteronomy 24:1–4](#) to see the "law" to which Jesus referred.

In the interpretation and correlation sections, we'll explore the meaning of Jesus' teaching on divorce. For now, reflect on the heavy impact of His warnings in [Matthew 5:27–32](#). His followers probably figured that as long as they avoided adultery, they were without sin. What was Jesus helping them to understand about their need for heart-level cleansing that only He could provide?



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Verbal Integrity—Matthew 5:33–37

The topic of breaking our marriage vows through adultery naturally led Jesus to talk about the importance of *keeping our word*. Restate Jesus' instructions in your own words (*Matthew 5:33–37*).

Even in our day, we add little oaths to our promises, like, “Cross my heart” or “So help me God,” because we worry that people might not take our word seriously. A better plan, according to Jesus, is to make promise-keeping a lifestyle so that our character speaks on our behalf.

*Isn't it refreshing to be around a person who says, “Yes, I will do that,” and they do it?
Promise keeping is never more important than between a husband and a wife.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



Interpretation: Jesus and Divorce

Let's examine further Jesus' teaching on divorce. As we read earlier, the biblical backdrop is Deuteronomy 24:1–4. In the original context, Moses was adjudicating a complicated case in which a husband “found some indecency” in his wife and wrote her “a certificate of divorce” (Deuteronomy 24:1 NASB). The religious teachers missed Moses' bigger point about purity in marriage and got sidetracked with debates over the meaning of *indecency*. They were preoccupied with finding grounds for divorce while Jesus focused on preserving the sanctity of marriage.



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On pages 101–102 of his commentary, Pastor Chuck Swindoll explains Jesus' teaching in light of this context. Read this section and write down what you discover about the meaning of [Matthew 5:31–32](#). Feel free to consult other resources, such as [Constable's Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#).

Jesus was constantly lifting God's moral standard higher than the standard other rabbis taught. While the rabbis were giving husbands a way out of marriage, Jesus was barring the door. Even His exception clause legitimizing divorce, "unless she has been unfaithful" (Matthew 5:32), wasn't meant to be taken lightly. Grounds for divorce occur when there is ongoing sexual sin, but even in such situations, like Moses, Jesus would not have *prescribed* divorce only *permitted* it as a concession to sin.

God originally planned the marriage bond to be between one man and one woman for life. If a partner is unfaithful and seeks forgiveness and restoration, the other partner, ideally, will forgive and find a way to deal with it. Divorce is a divine concession, not a divine command. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: More of Jesus and Divorce

Later in His ministry, the Pharisees pressed Jesus on His views about divorce, and Jesus took the opportunity to teach about marriage in more depth. Read the encounter in [Matthew 19:3–12](#). We'll dig deeper into this passage in a later study. For now, write down one or two key points Jesus made about God's view of the permanence and sanctity of marriage.



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According to Jesus, Moses “permitted divorce only as a concession to your hard hearts” (Matthew 19:8). It was a concession not a commandment. For a more thorough explanation of Jesus’ teaching on divorce and remarriage, refer to Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s discussion of Matthew 19:1–12 in the second volume of his *Insights on Matthew* commentary.² Other verses on the subject include Genesis 2:18–25; Malachi 2:13–16; 1 Corinthians 7:1–16; Ephesians 5:22–33; 1 Peter 3:1–7.

Application: Fulfilling Our Commitment to Jesus’ Teaching

Jesus’ words shine into our world like a moral beacon giving us much-needed direction in this morally wayward world. Two overarching truths sum up Jesus’ teaching:

- *When you marry, marry for life.* Permanence is essential to true partnership.
- *When you speak, say what you mean and mean what you say.* Make keeping your word a habit and people will never question your integrity.

Perhaps you can add more principles based on Jesus’ teaching. What would they be?

How can you bring to life these principles in your relationships?



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Sexual intimacy in marriage is a gift from God, however, we compromise the sanctity of sex with lustful thoughts. Jesus spoke in hyperbole to “gouge” out an eye or “cut” off a hand that causes us to sin (Matthew 5:29–30). However, His point is clear: *we must be ruthless in the measures we take to keep our hearts pure*. What steps can you take to shield your eyes from lustful images?

For further help in overcoming sexual sin, we encourage you to speak with your pastor or Christian counselor. Also consult the topical pages, [Men's Purity](#), [Women's Purity](#), and [Pornography](#) at insight.org. Here you will find more resources, including a Bible study designed for you to complete with an accountability partner, titled, “Shield Your Eyes, Guard Your Heart.” With God's help, you can experience the blessings of “those whose hearts are pure” (5:8).



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I confess that I am a sinner in need of Your cleansing touch. Shield me from the Enemy's condemnations for past sins and offenses. Open a doorway to a new way of living that is pure and healthy, joyful and free. Thank You for Your fidelity to me despite my moral failures and may I always be faithful to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”
2. *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 16–28*, vol. 1B (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 94–108. Other verses on the subject include Genesis 2:18–25; Malachi 2:13–16; 1 Corinthians 7:1–16; Ephesians 5:22–33; 1 Peter 3:1–7.

