

Sermon on the Mount

Lesson 5 Article

The saying about divorce in 5:32 has caused much agony and sharp disagreement. Jesus is stating an absolute ideal of faithful marriage, and anything which breaks it is a failure of the ideal. This does not mean that it cannot be forgiven; even as Christ can forgive the word of anger, or the striking back, or the hatred of enemies, he can forgive this failure to reach the ideal in marriage. But the problem of a broken marriage cannot be legalized away—it must be faced, acknowledged, and redeemed by God’s grace.

The entire Sermon on the Mount is the statement of an absolute ethic. Any attempt to work out little legalistic loopholes so that we may “keep” the Sermon on the Mount is a perversion of its purpose. Jesus gave it to us to stand there as a constant challenge and rebuke. It sets before us a goal which we will never reach until we have come into the presence of the heavenly Father. It brings us to our knees in repentance, and to our feet for a new effort to follow him more perfectly every day.

Truth for today.—Nothing is needed more today than the challenge of this Sermon. People are confused by changing moral standards, shocking conduct on the part of young and old, and the relativism of all values. Here Jesus gives us an absolute standard of life and moral conduct. No matter how far we miss the mark, we know where the goal is. It is the certain assurance that the Christian disciple needs in this troubled world.¹

So much of business, politics, government, the educational system, science, religion, and even family life is built on falsehoods and half-truths that a sudden revelation of the whole truth would cause society as we know it to disintegrate. It would be too devastating to handle.

Yet even the most corrupt and deceptive societies have always realized that, in certain areas at least, the “real truth” is necessary. Courts of law require witnesses to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Without truth, even a semblance of justice would be impossible. Because of the extreme importance of truthful testimony to justice, perjury itself is a crime that can bring severe penalties. Even gangs of criminals and conspirators, who use lying and cheating as their stock-in-trade, demand the truth among themselves, because it is necessary to their own survival.

Individually men are inclined to the truth only when it benefits them, yet collectively they have always known something of its importance and rightfulness—even outside courts of law. The great Roman orator Cicero said, “Truth is the highest thing a man may experience.” Sadly, with most people it is an infrequent experience. Daniel Webster wrote, “There is nothing as powerful as truth and often nothing as strange.”

Even the ancient Jewish rabbis, whose unbiblical traditions and flippancy with the truth Jesus challenges in the Sermon on the Mount, moralistically considered lying-along with scoffing, hypocrisy, and slander-to be one of the four great sins that would shut a person out of God’s presence. In their consciences men know that truth is right and essential. That is one reason they go to such lengths to make what they say *appear* to be truthful. Our problem is in *being* truthful.²

¹ *The teacher's Bible commentary*. 1972 (F. H. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs, Ed.) (593–594). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

² MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1985). *Matthew*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary (320). Chicago: Moody Press.