



Six Examples of Inside Out Righteousness Part 2: Be Divorce Free and Falsehood Free (Matthew 5:31-37)

Example 3: Be Divorce Free (Matthew 5:31-32)

Have you or anyone in your immediate family been divorced? *Divorce* means “to go separate ways.” A couple cannot divorce unless they have first been married. God designed marriage for the man to *leave* his family, *cleave* to his wife, and *weave* his life with hers (Genesis 2:24). Consequently, God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). In spite of the Bible’s clarity on the issue, the divorce rate is higher among the churched than the unchurched. In His third of *six examples of inside out righteousness*, Jesus taught His disciples to *be divorce free*. In each example, Jesus followed a three-fold pattern: (1) He addressed an Old Testament command saying, “You have heard that it was said;” (2) He alluded to the Pharisees’ legalistic interpretation; and (3) He clarified the intent, or spirit, of the law, prefacing His fulfillment with, “But I tell you.”

The Old Testament command: “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce’” (Matthew 5:31). Jesus referenced Moses’ Law that said, “If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house” (Deuteronomy 24:1). How one defined “indecent” was the hinge point in the interpretation and application of this verse.

The Legalistic Interpretation: “*A husband who gives his wife a certificate of divorce has no obligation to her.*” Two thousand years ago, two rabbinical schools differed in their interpretation of “indecent.” One held a conservative interpretation, the other one liberal. The conservative interpretation from the School of Shammai defined “indecent” as “adultery.” The liberal interpretation from the School of Hillel defined “indecent” as *anything* displeasing such as “spoiling a dish,” adding an exception for divorce when “finding another fairer than she.” Although that sounds flippant, it represents the climate of our culture today. Whether conservative or liberal, the legalistic interpretation of the law removes the man’s obligation to his former wife when he issues her a certificate of divorce.

Outside in righteousness says that what we do warrants a corresponding response from God. Get a legal divorce, and remove any obligation. That’s religion, not relationship. It follows the letter of the law, but misses the spirit of the law. Jesus fulfilled the law by clarifying its intent.

The Spirit of the Law: “But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery” (Matthew 5:32). The exception of adultery is not a one-time act to be used as a loophole to exit one’s marriage. Rather, it is a continual,



unrepentant act; one that is also superseded by forgiveness. Jesus said that Moses permitted divorce only because men’s hearts were hard, noting that divorce was outside God’s original design (Matthew 19:8). In essence, Jesus said, “*Be committed*,” which means, “to stay together.”

Inside out righteousness flows from the heart—a heart that is fully surrendered to Christ. This is how His righteousness is applied to us. Commitment is the spirit of the law because God is committed—He maintains His love (Exodus 34:7). He will never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). Christ is the ultimate picture of that commitment. On the way to the cross, He said to the Father, “Not my will, but yours” (Luke 22:42). In a world where there is so much desire for change in relationships, we can take heart that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). We will remain committed to our spouses only through Christ in us. Our commitment to Him is reflected in our commitment to each other. After all, God is searching throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him (2 Chronicles 16:9).

Street Smarts for The Restoration Road

If you have been divorced, you have not committed the unforgivable sin. In Christ, God will forgive you and restore you. If you are considering marriage, realize that you are about to make a covenant—not merely an agreement—with three parties: you, your fiancé, and Christ. If you are considering leaving your spouse for another person, then turn back to keep your commitment made before God. Most churches will not marry a couple where one party has left his spouse for the other because Jesus was so clear on this issue (Matthew 19:3-12). That relationship is rooted in sin and dishonors God.

Example 4: Be Falsehood Free (Matthew 5:33-37)

Have you ever broken your word? When we do so, we say one thing and do another. Our walk doesn’t match our talk. In His fourth of *six examples of inside out righteousness*, Jesus taught His disciples to *be falsehood free*. He said that a disciple’s walk should match his talk.

The Old Testament command: “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath’” (Matthew 5:33a). The Old Testament repeated the command that an oath made to God must not be broken. A man was bound to keep his word, doing everything that he said he would do (Leviticus 19:12; Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21). His walk was to match his talk. The ninth of the Ten Commandments simply said that one should not lie (Exodus 20:16).

The Legalistic Interpretation: “But keep the oaths you have made to the Lord” (Matthew 5:33b). Following the letter of the law at the expense of the spirit of the law



said, “*Keep only your oaths sworn to the Lord.*” Two thousand years ago, Rabbis taught that swearing by things other than God made oaths not binding; thus, providing a loophole to break an oath. People swore by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, and their heads, or lives, so that they could later have a loophole to lie. We do the same today. When our word is doubted, we say, “Swear to God.” Sometimes we offer a lesser oath, “Swear on the Bible.” “Swear on a stack of Bibles.” While all the time, we have our fingers crossed.

The Spirit of the Law: “But I tell you, Do not swear at all... Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’” (Matthew 5:34-37). The spirit of the law is that we would have hearts that are honest, that we would *be truthful*. Jesus said that experiencing the truth sets us free (John 8:32). Similarly, a businessman said, “When I tell the truth, I don’t have to remember what I said.” When we have hearts that are truthful, our walk matches our talk. We don’t need oaths because our word is our bond.

Inside out righteousness desires the heart of God. God is truthful (John 3:33; Psalm 31:5). Christ is truth (John 14:6). He referenced the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth (John 14:17). It’s Christ’s Spirit of truth dwelling in us that allows us to discern truth from falsehood (1 John 4:6).

Street Smarts for The Restoration Road

This week, avoid saying, “Swear on the Bible” or “Swear to God.” Rather, let your “Yes” be “Yes” and your “No” be “No.” This doesn’t mean that you are stubborn or immovable. It means that your word is your bond. Your walk matches your talk. Be truthful, and you won’t have to remember what you said.

Conclusion

Be divorce and falsehood free by being committed and truthful. This occurs when we fully surrender to the Spirit of Christ in us. Only His righteousness is acceptable to our holy God.