

Lesson 9

Righteousness That Surpasses the Scribes and Pharisees - Part 4

Key Scripture Readings: Matthew 5:33-37

Summary

- Jesus also addressed His standard for oath making and keeping. The corrupt scribes and Pharisees had formulated loopholes to get out of keeping vows and commitments (Matthew 5:33-37).
- Avoiding misusing and abusing God's name was a serious matter to the Jews. They would often avoid saying God's name in fear of mispronouncing it.
- Euphemisms for God's name were eventually formed. Swearing by these was considered not as severe as swearing by God's true name. This would be similar to how people in our time make promises but feel they don't have to keep them if their fingers are crossed behind their backs.
- The scribes and Pharisees taught that one was not bound to keep a vow if he swore by Jerusalem (the city of God), or the earth (God's creation), or by heaven (God's throne). They were only bound if they swore by the name of God.
- Jesus condemns all of their nonsense! He is not condemning making oaths. Instead, He is condemning those who make oaths and fail to keep them! His standards require disciples always to seek to keep their commitments and promises. In Matthew 5:37, the Lord says, "But let your statement be, 'yes, yes' or 'no, no'; anything beyond these is of evil."
- Solomon offers a similar thought. "When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay" (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5).
- James also offers a similar thought. "But above all, my brethren, do not swear; either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment" (James 5:12).
- Numerous passages demand followers of Jesus be honest in all their dealing. "Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each of you with his neighbor, for you are members of one another" (Ephesians 4:25). "Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices" (Colossians 4:9). "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal faithfully are His delight" (Proverbs 12:22).
- God is faithful to all of the promises He makes (Hebrews 10:23). He expects nothing less from His children!

Study Questions

1. Describe the “loopholes” the scribes and Pharisees created to get out of vow keeping? List some ways that people attempt to create the same kind of “loopholes” today.
2. What often causes people to lie?
3. What does Jesus teach about making vows and vow keeping? List some practical ways in which this teaching should impact our daily lives.
4. List some promises made by God that He was determined to keep. How should God’s faithfulness impact us?
5. What are the natural consequences of a dishonest life?
6. What are the natural consequences of an honest life?
7. Who is called the “father of lies” in the Bible? Why is he called this? Who does Jesus say follows in his wicked footsteps? See John 8:44-45.