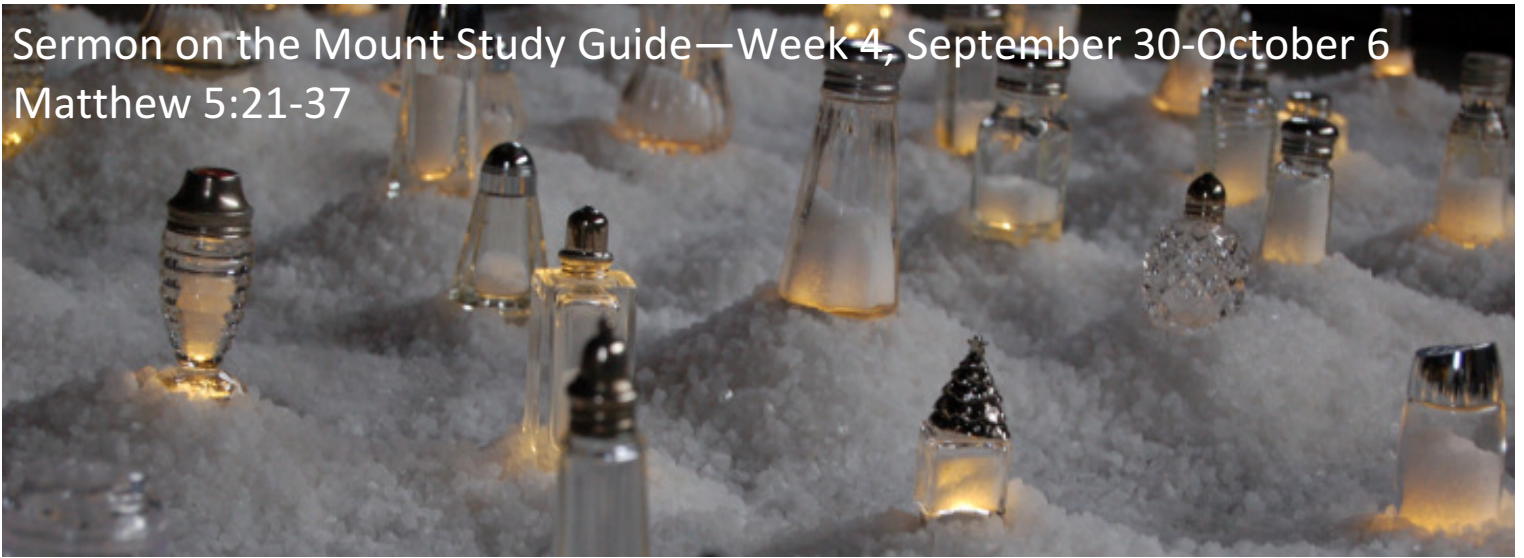


# Sermon on the Mount Study Guide—Week 4, September 30-October 6

## Matthew 5:21-37



- I. “Now, when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.” (Matthew 5:1-2)
- II. Opening prayer for Illumination
- III. Read Matthew 5:21-37
- IV. Stott Study Guide: pp. 17-23
- V. *The Divine Conspiracy*, pp. 144-176:

As we saw when we looked at his treatment of the Beatitudes, Dallas Willard forcefully resists the notion that Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount merely replace the Pharisaical legalism of his time with a new, more “Christian” legal line for people to toe. Indeed, Willard argues that actions, in and of themselves, are not what Jesus seeks to change. Rather, he writes, “It is the inner life of the soul that we must aim to transform, and then behavior will naturally and easily follow. But not the reverse. A special term is used in the New Testament to mark the character of the inner life when it is as it should be. This is the term *dikaiosune*” (144).

According to Willard, *dikaiosune* is best translated as a paraphrase, something along the lines of “‘what that is about a person that makes him or her really right or good.’ For short, we might say ‘true inner goodness’” (145). Per Willard, it is *dikaiosune* that Christ seeks in us. It is the total and complete transformation of who we are as persons that he’s after. Not a collection of “right actions.” Not a nicer tone of voice. Not a more consistent practice of Judeo-Christian values. At least, he’s not after things like those on their own.

Rather, in the Sermon on the Mount, through the announcement of his Kingdom in the here and now, Jesus is looking for our complete redemption. Our recreation. Our restoration.

Fact: Jesus has saved us. We couldn’t achieve that on our own. No amount of trying on our part could have made us right with God. So God became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ to save us from our rebellion against him.

Another fact: in response to God’s gracious saving of us through Jesus Christ, we are to live lives of thankful obedience before our Lord and Savior. This process is called “sanctification” in theology, and it’s all about how our lives change as children of God, as members of his Kingdom, as people who have “true inner goodness.”

Thus, the way that we view things like anger, lust, coercion, and other human impulses changes in light of who we have become in Christ.

As a way of getting even deeper into this introduction to Matthew 5:21-37, please take a look at the “Six Contrasts of the Old and the New Moral Reality” on pages 146-147 in *The Divine Conspiracy*.

## VI. Questions of 1<sup>st</sup> Importance:

### 1. Questions for the Text

- i. Willard makes a distinction between anger, which he describes as “a spontaneous response that has a vital function in life” and contempt, which he argues is “a greater evil than anger” (151). Contempt, according to Willard, is the utter despising of someone to the extent that you don’t care one way or another what happens to that person. As such, contempt is dehumanizing another person to such an extent that he or she is worthy of no consideration at all, one way or the other. How does such an understanding affect the way we read Matthew 5:21-26? Might it be that Jesus isn’t arguing against the natural and healthy emotion of anger so much as he’s arguing against its manifestation in our actions and views of other people?
- ii. Willard maintains that the reason Jesus preaches against adultery and lust in verses 27-30 is because it cheapens human intimacy. He writes that we “keep hammering the sex button in the hope that a little intimacy might finally dribble out” (*DC*, 163). How does our culture view sexual restraint? In what way are Jesus’ words a corrective for our over-saturation with sex?
- iii. Willard writes that remembering how Jesus ordered the Sermon on the Mount is extremely important to understanding it correctly. He argues that “it is not an accident that Jesus deals with divorce *after* having dealt with anger, contempt, and obsessive desire” (*DC*, 172). How does our understanding of Matthew 5:21-30 affect our reading of Jesus’ teaching on divorce in verses 31-32? In what ways might a serious approach to anger and lust change how we view divorce in our culture and church?
- iv. Willard argues that the biggest problem with swearing is not that it makes light of God’s name. Rather, “the wrongness of swearing lies deeper. We are making use of people, trying to bypass their understanding and judgment to trigger their will and possess them for our purposes” (*DC*, 174-175). In other words, Willard maintains that Jesus was first and foremost speaking against the manipulative nature of swearing—using strong language simply as a technique for forcing people to do what we want them to. Does this make sense as a valid interpretation of Matthew 5:33-37? How does this teaching on oaths connect to what Jesus has said in the previous verses (21-33)? How might the order of the Sermon inform us on when reading this passage?

### 2. Questions for the World

- i. How is anger or contempt de-humanizing?
- ii. How is lust de-humanizing?
- iii. How is divorce de-humanizing?
- iv. How is oath-making de-humanizing?
- v. How are these things problematic when it comes to cultivating *dikaiosune* in ourselves?

## VII. Questions of 2<sup>nd</sup> Importance:

### 1. Questions for the Text

- i. “Raca” is an Aramaic term from Jesus’ day. It’s possible it originated from the sound one makes when getting ready to spit. How does this related to the idea of contempt described above. How does this inform us about what Jesus is saying in this text?
- ii. The case could be made that Jesus’ teaching on murder and anger in Matthew 5:21-26 sets the tone for the rest of the chapter (including next week’s topics). Does such a reading resonate with us? If so, how does anger affect and inform evils like adultery, lust, divorce, and oath making?

### 2. Questions for the World

- i. Read sections “Beyond the Divorce Papers” and “The Principle of Hardness of Heart” on pages 168-171 of *The Divine Conspiracy*. How does an understanding on the background of divorce in Jesus day affect how we view divorce today? How was divorce the same? How was it different?
- ii. What are the implications of Matthew 5:21-37 for our lives today? What areas of our lives might we need to work on in light of what Jesus says in these verses?

## VIII. If so desired, watch Monday’s chapel on this week’s text at:

## IX. Suggested Spiritual Discipline for this week: Silence/Self-Control