

Lesson 5—Exceeding the Righteousness of the Pharisees (Part 1)

Introduction

As Jesus begins the heart of the Sermon on the Mount, He makes a bold statement: “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (5:20). That would have shocked His listeners. The Pharisees were the most visibly religious people of their day. But Jesus wasn’t impressed with appearances—He was after something deeper.

In this lesson, Jesus begins to show what that deeper righteousness looks like. He takes two well-known commands—*Do not murder* and *Do not commit adultery*—and presses them inward. He doesn’t dismiss the Law; He fulfills it by uncovering the heart behind the command.

Anger and lust may not leave a visible mark, but Jesus teaches that they corrode the soul, damage relationships, and break covenant with God. These are not “small sins.” Jesus’ words force us to ask:

- Am I harboring anger or contempt toward others?
- Am I treating purity lightly or making excuses for lustful thoughts?
- Do I take sin seriously enough to make hard changes?

Jesus isn’t calling us to surface-level religion. He is calling us to transformation from the inside out. Let’s listen closely—not just to understand the commands, but to let them search and shape our hearts.

I. Matthew 5:21-26

A. Observation

1. What themes or key ideas are in this passage?
2. In this passage, Jesus describes a three-fold progressions of anger and guilt.
 - a. Write out the progression of anger described:

1)

2)

3)

- b. Write out the progression of guilt described:

1)

2)

3)

3. List at least one observation per verse in the space below.

a. Matthew 5:21

b. Matthew 5:22

c. Matthew 5:23

d. Matthew 5:24

e. Matthew 5:25

f. Matthew 5:26

B. Interpretation

1. Are murder and anger related?

2. How does anger make one guilty?

3. If we have no angry, but someone is angry with us should we care?

4. What are we to do when someone is angry with us?

5. Does God care about the sacrifices?

6. If we do nothing, and someone is angry with us what might happen?

7. How does Jesus' teaching exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees?

8. What is the most important/overall point of these verses?

C. Application

1. What are you doing to eliminate anger?
2. List at least three facts or commands stated or implied in this passage that are relevant to your own life:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
3. What will you do this week to implement at least one of these facts or commands into your life?
4. Suggested Practice – Reconciliation First: If there is unresolved tension in your life—especially with someone in your household or church—take one step this week toward peace. A text. A call. A face-to-face conversation. Then, share with a trusted friend what that process taught you.

D. Teach It

1. How would I teach my children or family the importance of dealing with anger quickly and kindly?
2. How can I model reconciliation and peace in my home, church, or friendships?
3. Conversation starter: “Have you ever held on to anger too long? What changed when you finally let it go or made peace?”

II. Matthew 5:27-32

A. Observation

1. What themes or key ideas are in this passage?

2. What contrasts does Jesus make between outward behavior and inward desire?

3. List at least one observation per verse in the space below:
 - a. Matthew 5:27
 - b. Matthew 5:28
 - c. Matthew 5:29
 - d. Matthew 5:30
 - e. Matthew 5:31
 - f. Matthew 5:32

B. Interpretation

1. What is Jesus teaching us about the relationship between lust and adultery?

2. How is this deeper than the Law's original command?

3. What do Jesus' strong metaphors (e.g., cutting off hand, plucking out eye) teach us about the seriousness of sin?

4. What was the Pharisees' approach to divorce (cf. Matthew 19:3–9)? How does Jesus exceed it?

5. What is the connection between personal purity and relational faithfulness?

C. Application

1. Where do I struggle with purity—in thought, media, relationships, or priorities?

2. Are there boundaries I need to put in place to guard my eyes and heart?

3. Do I treat marriage as sacred and lifelong—or as something conditional and negotiable?

4. List at least three facts or commands stated or implied in this passage that are relevant to your own life:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
5. What will you do this week to implement at least one of these facts or commands into your life?
6. Suggested Practice—Set a Guard: Choose one way to reduce temptation this week: remove an app, limit certain media, or replace a habit with Scripture or prayer. Pair this with an accountability partner or journal entry to reflect on the change.

D. Teach It

1. How would I teach my children or youth group that purity starts in the heart, not just in behavior?
2. How can I model purity and faithfulness in my marriage, dating, or singleness?

Conclusion

The righteousness that Jesus calls us to is not surface-level—it's soul-deep. It doesn't settle for keeping the letter of the law while ignoring the heart behind it.

In these verses, Jesus takes two areas of everyday life—anger and fidelity—and shows how the kingdom demands more than mere appearance of faithfulness. It calls for reconciliation, integrity, and peace. It calls for faithfulness in our hearts. The Pharisees polished their appearances. Jesus purifies the heart.

Let's examine our hearts—not to be shamed, but to be shaped. Let us ask: Who have I hurt or dismissed in anger? What habits are shaping my thoughts and desires? What do I need to cut off so I can pursue what matters most?

The kingdom of heaven isn't built by those who appear righteous, but by those who do the will of the Father—from the inside out. Let us be those men.