



# International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

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## Matthew 5:21-32 New Revised Standard Version July 14, 2019

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, July 14, 2019**, is from **Matthew 5:21-32**.

**Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

**(Matthew 5:21) “You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’**

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used an example to illustrate what He meant in Matthew 5:20 — “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” In Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17, God commanded, “You shall not murder.” The punishment for murder was execution. In addition, the murderer will face the judgment of God. In Deuteronomy 8:19, God warned. “If you do forget the LORD your God and follow other gods to serve and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. Like the nations that the LORD is destroying before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God.” God forbid murder, but God permitted capital punishment and killing in a just war, for in the Old Testament He commanded both at times. The

religious leaders that eventually plotted Jesus' murder and used the Romans to crucify Him had a form of outward righteousness, but they were inwardly evil. Though they may have escaped judgment in this life, they were liable to face the judgment of God. Our righteousness as Christians must exceed their form of righteousness, and the Holy Spirit within Christians enables them to obey God with all the glory going to Jesus.

**(Matthew 5:22) But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire.**

God is not only concerned about our outward actions. God looks upon a person's heart and considers their intentions, motivations, thoughts, and words that show a lack of love for God and others. Anger or jealousy can lead to insulting someone and even murder. Anger and jealousy eventually led the religious leaders to plot Jesus' murder. Insulting someone can even lead to a person being judged in a court of law. Calling someone a fool can harm them emotionally and mentally and can even lead others to mistreat them too. Feelings of anger, envy, unforgiveness, and resentment can make a person miserable on the inside. Whether or not they express their harmful feelings in actions or words, their demeanor can make those around them unhappy. Though we might not act upon our sinful thoughts, if they are not repented of, Jesus warned that all these thoughts can result in deserving hell. Jesus warned His followers to give careful attention to their thought-life and their words as well as their actions. Unjustified anger, insulting words, bullying, and name-calling are not expressions of love for others.

**(Matthew 5:23) So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you,**

This verse refers to a person who is justified or right in having something against you because you have done something wrong against them. Perhaps you have committed one of the sins described in Matthew 5:22. Perhaps you have stolen from someone in violation of the civil and moral law of God. If so, giving a gift at the altar can be no substitute for trying to make

things right as soon as possible with the person that you have sinned against. This verse does not teach that before you offer your gift at the altar you must make things right with a person who is or has been treating you with contempt like someone described in verse 22—for this reconciliation may be impossible to achieve and your offerings are materially important for the work of God on earth and spiritually important to you.

**(Matthew 5:24) leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.**

You can go to someone that you have offended and offer an apology and try to make things right, but this does not mean that they will accept your efforts to make amends or forgive you. Having made the effort at reconciliation with them, you can go back to the altar and give your gift. We should not think that we can substitute going to church services or giving offerings at church for loving our neighbor and trying to do what is loving and right to all people, especially those we have sinned against.

**(Matthew 5:25) Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison.**

This verse continues to emphasize that you have harmed someone. Possibly, you may have done something against someone that could land you in court or in prison. It is better to try to solve problems before they get to the point of going to court; this is especially so for a follower of Jesus Christ who wants to love God and others and show forth Christian love. There can be civil consequences for breaking civil laws that will be enforced whether a person offers gifts to God or not. A gift to God will not bribe God to act unjustly or keep you from suffering a just punishment as a consequence of your sins.

**(Matthew 5:26) Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.**

In Jesus' day, and at other times in history, a debtor could be placed in prison until he paid his debts (see Jesus' parable in Matthew 18:23-35). In some cases, this meant that his family would need to work off his debt to get him released from prison. According to laws in the Old Testament, a thief would be ordered to make restitution, and as punishment he would be required to pay back more than he stole (see Exodus 22:1-4). Jesus indicated that the civil law would be enforced against a lawbreaker, and his religious performance would not set aside the enforcement of a civil penalty. The practice of religious rituals will not protect the sinner.

**(Matthew 5:27) "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'**

From the example of the scribes and Pharisees, we know that many in Jesus' day were more concerned with keeping their traditions and ceremonies to gain favor with God than in keeping the moral law of God. The Ten Commandments teach "You shall not commit adultery," one of the moral laws of God. A case in point was their plot to murder Jesus during Passover but their refusal to enter Pilate's court because that would make them ritually unclean during Passover celebration. Jesus' teaching shows that breaking the moral law of God is sin, and breaking the moral law is a matter of our heart and not just our outward actions.

**(Matthew 5:28) But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**

People naturally feel an attraction toward some people, which is not a sin. However, because of this natural attraction, a person can be tempted by their emotional and physical nature (the flesh) to speculate about and begin to imagine over a period of time what they might like to do with that person that would be sinful for both of them, if acted upon. The name for this type of imagining and willful speculation the Bible calls "lust," which we must turn our minds from doing as quickly as possible, because if we do not a natural attraction can soon become an act of sin, adultery, in a person's heart. Lust can also lead to sinful outward behavior often described in the Book of Proverbs, which, as the Proverbs describe, can lead to death.

**(Matthew 5:29) If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.**

Jesus sometimes used hyperbole, the making of exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally, to get people's attention to make an important point. Jesus did not intend for a person to literally remove an eye or a hand to keep from committing a sin. We have just learned from Jesus that we can sin in our minds. However, if something we possess, or would like to possess, is influencing us to sin in our minds and hearts, then we need to get rid of that influence so it will no longer have power over us. The sin in the heart can lead to committing sin with our whole body, and to an actual physical slavery to sin (or addiction) that we do not have the power to break by ourselves. It may even mean we need to move far away from someone or something while we battle the temptations that come into our minds. With the help of Jesus, by going to Jesus for help, we can receive the power to overcome our sins and temptations that can lead us into hell.

**(Matthew 5:30) And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.**

The eye gives us the ability to see into the world. Through the gate of the eye, we can begin to commit all types of sin in our hearts and minds. If that begins to happen, we need to shut our eyes and our minds to those parts of the world that are leading us into sin. Mental sins can lead us into physical sins. For example, a person might covet something or someone that is forbidden, and after speculating more about possessing it or them, they may steal the thing or person they want (steal a person from their husband or wife, for example). It is better to stop mental sins before the person's mind leads them into physical sins. It is better to repent and bow morally and spiritually before Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and ask Him for help to stop mental and physical sins than go into hell as a slave of sin and Satan.

**(Matthew 5:31) "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'**

In Mark 10:4, the Pharisees said to Jesus, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.” In Matthew 19:8, Jesus explained why Moses gave this command: “It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so” (See also, Mark 10:5). Hard-heartedness and other sins can lead to divorce. In Mark 10:6-9, Jesus gave God’s reason from the creation of men and women why divorce should not be permitted — “But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

**(Matthew 5:32) But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”**

The scribes and Pharisees taught that a man could divorce his wife for any reason if he was displeased with her in any way. Jesus taught that easy divorce was wrong, and the only justifiable reason for a man to divorce his wife was unchastity, a sin which if his wife repented could be forgiven so the marriage could be saved by a man who was not hard-hearted (and vice versa). The act of a man against a chaste wife does not cause her to commit adultery; rather, in Jesus’ day a divorced woman was sometimes shunned and unable to find work, so she would sometimes commit adultery to keep from starving to death. Divorce could put a woman in this horrible situation with horrible choices to make. If a man and woman plotted a divorce so the man could marry the divorced woman (and vice versa), this might be acceptable according to tradition, but Jesus called this adultery. Obviously, the church has struggled with the question of divorce and remarriage for many years. Historically, some churches have agreed that if a man or woman committed adultery against their wife or husband and a divorce resulted, then the divorce was biblical, and the church would record that the person sinned against was free to remarry without committing adultery. Others have added the sin of abandonment, which would allow the person abandoned to remarry without committing adultery. The Bible does not

teach that adultery or divorce are unforgivable sins; rather, marriage and the family are such important institutions ordained by God (also representing the relationship that Christians have with Jesus Christ and within the Church) that adultery and divorce are serious problems and sins.

### **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. How might our culture (or our churches) be different if more people practiced Jesus' teachings to His followers in Matthew 5:21-32?
2. What can anger lead to? Look closely at Matthew 5:22.
3. Are we supposed to try to make peace with everyone who unjustly holds something against us before we go to worship God? What did Jesus mean by Matthew 5:23-24?
4. How would you help someone who read Matthew 5:29-30, and then thought that Jesus meant for habitual sinners to mutilate or dismember themselves?
5. How can Mark 10:4 and Mark 10:11-12 help you understand Matthew 5:31-32?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly  
*International Bible Lesson.*

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