

Heavenly Relationships on Earth: Heaven's Radical Faithfulness

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[0 : 00] Let's turn to our reading. Now, Willie's continuing in the Sermon on the Mount, the six antithesis where Lord Jesus Christ unfolds the true meaning of the law. And in order to get the background, we're going to read, first of all, in the book of Deuteronomy, on page 165.

Book of Deuteronomy, page 165, reading from, first of all, 2321. Deuteronomy 2321, reading to 24, 5, and then some verses in chapter 25.

Deuteronomy 2321, Moses says, If you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay fulfilling it. For the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and you will be guilty of sin.

But if you refrain from vowing, you will not be guilty of sin. You shall be careful to do what has passed your lips, for you have voluntarily bowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth.

If you go into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes, as many as you wish, but you shall not put any in your bag. If you go into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's standing grain.

[1 : 25] When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes, because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs from his house.

And if she goes and becomes another man's wife, the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house. Or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife?

Then her former husband who sent her away may not take her again to be his wife after she has been defiled. For that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring a sin upon the land that the Lord your God is giving you for your inheritance.

Then over to chapter 25 and to verse 13. You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, a large and a small.

You shall not have in your house two kinds of measures, a large and a small. A full and fair weight you shall have. A full and fair measure you shall have.

[2 : 39] That your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. For all who do such things, who act dishonestly, are an abomination to the Lord your God.

Then over now to page 810 and to Matthew 5. Reading here verses 31 to 37.

Jesus continues here, verse 31. It was also said, whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce. But I say to you, that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery.

And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Again, you have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.

But I say to you, do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king.

[3 : 55] And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair black, white or black. Let what you say be simply yes or no.

Anything more than this comes from evil. Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Well then, turn with me, if you would, to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5, and the verses we read at verse 31.

It's important, as we study the Sermon on the Mount, that we keep reminding ourselves what this teaching is and isn't. It's not setting out a standard of conduct that if we aspire to it, if we keep it perfectly, then we will achieve the approval of God.

If it were that, those who are honest with themselves would find themselves in utter despair, because we know we cannot be perfect. Those who deceive themselves, who think they can be, would be impossibly pompous and self-righteous.

But it would all be hypocrisy, it would all be sham. It's not at all that. It is not about an effort to gain acceptance with God. But what it is about is an expression of righteousness.

[5 : 22] An expression of being right with God. In the lives of those that God has accepted as righteous by his sheer grace, by his sheer mercy, through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

And to live this way, to live in Jesus' way, is the evidence that we do know the Father. To live this way is the only way to express that right relationship with God which he has granted us.

By living heaven's ways on earth in our daily lives. So real kingdom membership will always be expressed in real kingdom manners, real kingdom morality.

And it will be evident in our thinking and in our behavior just because we are heaven's people. Because we are his people now already through the call of Jesus Christ.

And the reality of a real and living relationship with our heavenly Father will be visible. It will be tangible in all our heavenly relationships but lived out here on this earth.

[6 : 27] That's why in verses 14 to 16 Jesus says that we are the light of the world. And that light is to shine in the darkness so that people will see Christ in our lives. And be pointed by our lives and especially by the quality of our relationships.

Be pointed to our heavenly Father. Just as Jesus in his earthly life pointed people constantly to the heavenly Father. I made known to them your name, he prayed to the Father the night before his crucifixion.

And I will continue to make it known. That is through his love in the people that he calls to be his. To bear the Father's name. That's all of us who claim to be Christians.

And here in Matthew 5 verse 16 he says that people are to see us and our lives. And thus give glory to our Father in heaven. So what are people to see in the quality of our heavenly relationships here on earth?

Well as we've seen already, first of all they're to see that our relationships are radically loving. Reflecting heaven's radical love. Deep and comprehensive love within the Christian community.

[7 : 38] That's verses 21 to 26. Between brothers and sisters in Christ. Forgiveness, reconciliation is to be the feature of church life.

That's far more important to God than sacrifices and ceremonies and all of these things. Jesus says harmonious, loving, forgiving relationships are what matter in the church.

And compared to that it doesn't matter a hoot. If you're the most dedicated member of the choir or the flyer team or the eldership or the cleaning rota or anything else.

No, people who make reconciliation with their brethren, their top priority, even when they've wronged us. These are the people who are real kingdom people according to Jesus.

And those who don't, well, surely they can't be. That's worth pondering, isn't it? It's worth asking ourselves questions about that. But we saw in verses 43 to 48, you see that this stretches far beyond the mere Christian community.

[8 : 44] This love, says Jesus, is to be extended everywhere. Even to enemies. Even to our persecutors. Because we are to love with the radical love of heaven itself.

That's what it means, verse 45. He says to be true sons of our heavenly father. It's just genuine kingdom manners. It's just basic Christian practice. It's how this family lives.

Radical love. Then second, our relationships are to be and to be seen to be radically pure with heaven's radical purity. As we saw last time. Radical purity inwardly, verses 27 to 30, in our private lives.

Right to the very heart of our thought lives, our imaginations. And Jesus says that adultery, just as all impurity, is at root a matter of the heart. And it's in the heart these things must be dealt with.

If we are to live truly and purely as Christ's people. But also, Jesus says, radically pure lives must be lived outwardly in public life. That's verses 38 to 42, as we saw.

[9 : 51] We are not to retaliate. We are not to assert ourselves to protect our reputation. To protect our rights. To keep hold of our riches. We are to be not graspers, but givers.

Ready to give up all for others' sake. Because we don't idolize and worship mere earthly things. We are to show heaven's radical purity. With affection and worship only for God.

Not for the passing things of this world. It's when our reputation and our dignity and our possessions are threatened. That's when we find out, isn't it? That's when we find out what we really do value the most.

What we really do worship. And alas, often we discover that we're not nearly as pure in our devotion as we like to think we are. Radical purity.

But third, and this is our focus today. Right at the very heart of Matthew's symmetrical arrangement of these six paragraphs here. These six antitheses.

[10:54] Right at the very heart of these two paragraphs. Verses 31 to 37. And they teach us that real kingdom righteousness will always be expressed in relationships that express not only heaven's radical love and purity, but also heaven's radical faithfulness.

Now the faithfulness of God is perhaps the very central affirmation that the Bible makes about the nature of God, the Lord our Savior. He is Jehovah.

He is Yahweh. He is I am. He is the covenant God, the God who makes and keeps all his promises. And his word is like an everlasting rock that will never perish.

Heaven and earth may pass away, but my words will never pass away, said Jesus. He is the faithful God. And he is faithful to all who are his always and forever.

And so all who are his, who share his family traits, his DNA as it were, they will be people who likewise are radically faithful and pure and true.

[12:02] In their most intensive and exclusive relationships, which of course is epitomized in the marriage relationship. But also in their most extensive and inclusive relationships in every area of personal life, of professional life, of public life.

Kingdom people are faithful people. They can be trusted. They can be believed. They can be relied upon. So let's look at these verses then.

First of all, verses 31 to 32, which speak about radical faithfulness, absolute fidelity in marriage.

Now these verses get to the very heart of the issue of truth and faithfulness in the most intimate and exclusive of all human relationships.

And they remind us that the marriage bond is just that, a bond, a solemn promise made before God and before the world to be faithful till death us do part.

But you see, the scribes, the religious teachers, the rabbis of Jesus' day, they were guilty of utterly disregarding that reality. Their casuistry made them trivialize God's concern for marital fidelity that was in his law.

[13:22] And they cynically manipulated that law. Turning what God has given as a concession, a sad concession to human sinfulness and to the sad reality of relationship breakdown.

But turning that into a permission and into a process for easy divorce. So that you could get a divorce on almost any grounds you wanted. Now, to properly consider the Bible's teaching on marriage and divorce, of course, we would need to look at many other parts of Scripture.

Not least Matthew 19 and 1 Corinthians 7 and so on. And we can't do that today. There are a number of recordings on the website where we've dealt with these things in the past. I'd encourage you to listen to those if you have particular questions or particular situations that concern you.

But just looking at these verses in front of us, in fact, they do get to the very heart of the matter, don't they? And what is very clear, what is very plain, is this.

The scribes and the religious teachers, their chief interest was in the rules about divorce and how easily you could achieve that. But in total contrast, Jesus' interest is wholly in the sanctity of marriage itself.

[14:39] And its purpose in God's eyes is a lifelong union of fidelity and faithfulness. And the law of Moses that is alluded to here in verse 31 about a certificate of divorce is alluding to that that we read earlier in Deuteronomy chapter 24.

I think perhaps if you turn that up, it will be helpful, page 166, I think, in the church Bibles. Because I want you just to see again that far from being a pro-divorce passage, far less anything to do with easy divorce, in fact, it is quite the reverse.

And if you look at verse 5 that begins the next paragraph and really belongs with these verses, you'll see that that is a hugely pro-marriage command. You see, you're not to be sent away to the military or any other public duty that would separate you from your spouse in the first year of marriage.

That is a clear command, isn't it, to promote and to strengthen healthy marriage right at the start. But what we read about in verses 1 to 4 is not a command to divorce.

Of course not. It's a concession. And as Jesus says in Matthew 19, it is entirely due to the hardness of human hearts. It's a concession if these various sad and sordid situations should arise.

[16:00] Notice all the ifs in these verses. If this situation arises, well, then if that happens, yes, a proper procedure must be followed. Because, and this is the real point to note, all the focus here is on protecting the woman.

In the ancient world, she was very vulnerable to the heartless treatment of men. And this whole text is about ensuring that a woman is not treated as a chattel to be passed back and forward between careless men.

See, divorce in that culture meant almost certain destitution. Unless a woman could find another husband to take her in. And that's why verse 3 insists that she has a proper certificate of divorce. So that she is clearly and publicly recognized as somebody who is eligible and free to remarry. There is no legal impediment to her right to do that. Now, we don't have time to go into all the detail, but it's very clear, isn't it, what the main thrust is.

Jesus is saying the whole point of this law that you love to quote is actually to protect women from sinful exploitation by men like you.

[17:13] But I say to you, men should not be selfish and sinful like that to their wives in the first place. Men should be faithful in marriage. Jesus is emphasizing the law's protection of women.

And he's explicitly protecting them. Indeed, he's liberating them even more by saying, don't even think about divorce. Think about real fidelity and faithfulness.

And he is clearly laying the sin at the door of men. Look at verse 22. Come back to Matthew chapter 5 and look at verse 32. He is saying it's the man who carelessly divorces his wife that makes her commit adultery when she remarries.

Which will be her only option, of course, to avoid destitution. Or probably prostitution if she's not able to get married again. But he's the one, says Jesus. You're the one who sins and causes her to sin.

Because of what you've done. No matter all the correct legal paperwork that you think you might have in your hand. See, he's saying there is no way of avoiding guilt in God's eyes simply by having the correct religious paperwork.

[18:27] It's not correct legalities for divorce that God wants from you. It's honor and faithfulness in marriage that God wants from his people. Striking, isn't it, that Jesus both honors and liberates women all the more by forbidding divorce among his people.

Whereas our world today and our culture thinks that it liberates women by making divorce easier and easier. Well, let me ask. Has a culture of easier and easier divorce liberated and blessed the women of the Western world, do you think?

Not in my experience. It's quite the reverse. It's caused massive suffering and misery to women. And a huge burden of hurt very often to their children. Yes, also to men.

But undoubtedly, disproportionately to women. And it's caused, of course, vast tragedies of social breakdown right across our society.

That is undeniable. And in the vast majority of cases, it is women and children who suffer the most. I think that is just a plain fact. It's a fact economically and in a whole lot of other ways.

[19:42] Because men, it seems, are more unfaithful at large. Not always, of course. And especially now that feminism, not to mention the increasing utter confusion about sex and gender in our society, seems to be making women behave more and more like men.

Women are learning to emulate the bad habits of men, the disgraceful behavior of men. That's progress, I suppose. But for all in our culture today, at least I think as Don Carson puts it, love has become a mixture of physical desire and just vague sentimentality.

Marriage has become a provisional sexual union to be terminated when this pathetic pygmy love dissolves. But not so with you, says Jesus, to all who would claim to be his people.

We are to live with the manners and morality of heaven. We show heavenly relationships on earth and they are radically faithful relationships. Covenant faithfulness is enshrined in the very name of God, the Lord, who will be what he promises always to be, who will be faithful, changing, true.

The God who will never leave you nor forsake you. And we bear his name. And we've been born again to be faithful as he is.

[21 : 13] And so we honor marriage. We cherish fidelity. We hate the agony and the misery of infidelity. We run from it. And we should want to do all that we can to foster a culture that makes marital fidelity one of the most cherished and protected foundations that there is.

And we want to shine the light of the blessings of fidelity in marriage to the whole world. I was at a conference some years ago, a pastor's conference, and a man who was an evangelist in the United States was on the question panel.

And he was asked the question, how are we to reach people in this broken generation that we live in? And he said immediately, I'll tell you how.

We need to, in the church, show people truly Christian homes and marriages and families and let them see and experience real faithfulness. That's what drew me to the message of the church. He said, I grew up in a hopelessly broken home. But to come among a Christian family and see what fidelity in marriage and commitment means made me open my ears to the gospel that produced that.

[22 : 28] Our relationships must show that fidelity in the marriage bond to the world. Now that puts responsibility, of course, on all of us, whether we're married or not, both in our individual attitudes and actions and also very much those of the church as a whole.

And I want to say just one or two things about that. First of all, notice how upfront the Lord Jesus is in speaking about these issues of sexual behavior. He does so here in verse 32 and also in the whole paragraph above.

And neither he nor the rest of the Bible are prudes. Sex is a very important topic in the Bible. And it's mostly talked about in a very positive way. Because sex, good sex, satisfying sex, but rightful sex, is a vital part of healthy marriage.

And the fact is, friends, that very often the road to marital breakdown does involve problems which manifest, first of all, in the bedroom. And more often than not, not always, but mostly, it is a man's feeling of sexual need which is greater.

And it's he who may feel dissatisfied if things are not as they once were. And if they seem to be less than they ought to be in that area.

[23 : 53] And if Jesus here is fixing sinful men in his eyes particularly, and he is, then there is also plenty in Scripture that reminds wives that they also have a responsibility to their husbands sexually, as well as in other ways.

Paul is very blunt, isn't he, in 1 Corinthians 7 about conjugal rights and duties. And the Song of Songs is in our Bibles to remind us that learning about and investing in, well, satisfying and wholesomely erotic relationships in love within the marriage bond, that is an important thing that we must do.

if marriages are to flourish and not founder due to sexual tension and disappointment. Now, I don't think I need to say more about that in a mixed audience of all ages.

But there is a responsibility, isn't there, to every wife and to every husband to promote and to preserve healthy marriage. And that includes a healthy love life.

Paul says to the men, let every one of you love his wife as himself. And to the wife, he says, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. And part of that respect is remembering that testosterone is a gift of God, not a result of the fall.

[25 : 11] So that's the first thing. Secondly, I worry about divorce in the church. As I've said, I've dealt with this much more fully in other places.

But let me just say this. Jesus is absolutely clear here, just as he is explicit in Matthew 19, that divorce is not a part of God's plan for humanity.

From the beginning, he says, it was not so. And it was always only a concession for hard and sinful hearts. And so the principle for Christ's people is clear.

What God has joined together, let not man separate. Absolutely plain. But of course, even in the church, we are sinful, aren't we?

And our hearts are hard. And sinful actions happen. And Jesus acknowledges right here in Matthew 5 that sexual immorality can and does sometimes rupture the marriage bond and divorce can result.

[26 : 17] And Paul speaks similarly in 1 Corinthians 7 of that and other situations that provide for the necessity of divorce at times. But let's be clear, friends.

There is no such thing as marriage breakdown ever that is without sin. Covetous, sinful selfishness is the root always, either in one or the other or in both partners.

But among sinners, even saved and sanctified or rescued sinners, these things do happen. Shouldn't be. Shouldn't be. But we're sinful.

But friends, notice, Jesus will not allow the discussion to focus on the failure of marriage, nor on the rules for separation and divorce.

No. He constantly turns the focus back onto fidelity and onto marriage faithfulness. That's what I want you to be concerned with, he's saying.

[27 : 20] Kingdom people are not to be those who promote divorce or who remove obstacles to divorce or who make divorce easier or more accessible. No. We are to be people who promote marriage and who make marriage easier and marriage healthier and remove obstacles to happy and healthy marriage.

We are not to leave things to fleeting emotions and sentimentality. We're to make this a purposeful matter of our hearts and minds and souls and strength as the church of Jesus Christ.

A huge part of our problem is the sentimentality, the sheer silliness of our culture in this whole area of romantic love and marriage. People are searching for the one, my soulmate, the right one for me. Endlessly wondering about, is this really Mr. Right or is this really Miss Right? Being desperately frightened in case, well, perhaps it isn't the right one. Maybe I'll make a huge mistake.

Friends, this is utter lunacy. Don't think like that. Close your eyes and your ears to the world's confused sentimentality. Listen to what the Bible says.

[28 : 33] The Bible says marriage is not about desperately dreaming to find the right person. Marriage is about determinedly doing the right things.

It's about following God's plan, His way. Above all, in covenant fidelity. That determined commitment to fidelity, that is what grows the perfect marriage.

The perfect marriage is not going to be like walking into an ideal home exhibition show house on day one of your marriage, where everything is already there and absolutely perfect. That's the mistake that so many people make.

And what they discover on day two, if not day one, is help is not quite as perfect as I thought it was going to be. And they begin to wonder, have I made a mistake?

Perhaps I need to get out of this. No, no, no. I tell engaged couples that the perfect marriage begins on day one in a messy building site.

[29 : 36] The foundation is there and it's solid, of course, if you both share faith in Jesus Christ. And all the raw materials are there that God has given you to build the perfect marriage.

But you start building together today as a committed team, working side by side in the knowledge that that team is fixed and secure and permanent and unshakable.

And you see, if you have the right expectation at the start, well, it's a wholly different thing. That is a marriage that can flourish. So let me say this to those of you who are younger ones here.

Don't leave it too late to start building. Some people, including Christians, are so busy looking for that ideal home version of the dream of the perfect spouse.

That they are blind to plenty of worthy building partners that they could be getting on building a marriage with. And by the time they're wise to that, it's too late.

[30 : 37] So if you want my advice, open your eyes, scrub yourselves up, and make it look like you're interested in getting out on the building site. That's my advice.

But I think I also have the Spirit of God because God says, Rejoice in the wife of your youth. Don't leave it too late.

That's a word for the young. And, here's a word for parents. And the whole church. Don't make it harder than it should be.

Don't let's collude with our culture around us and putting obstacles in the way of healthy biblical marriage, especially at the start. One huge obstacle is this ridiculous expectation that everybody has nowadays of a vast, lavish, expensive wedding.

And far, far too many marriages are put off far too long until the wedding day can be perfect, ideal home exhibition like that. It's utter nonsense.

[31 : 38] And it's a huge waste of money. And I speak as a father of two daughters. I hope you're listening. Let us encourage simple, happy Christian weddings so that we can encourage the start of faithful, committed Christian marriage.

Because Christ's command to all of us, all in his church, is that we are to honor and cherish radical fidelity in the marriage bond. Heaven's radical faithfulness must be seen in our marriages.

We must be faithful and true in our most intensive and exclusive relationships. But also, look at verses 33 to 37, in our most extensive and inclusive relationships with all the world.

These verses teach just as clearly radical faithfulness, absolute fidelity in all social relationships. In other words, Jesus says, our word must be our bond in dealing with the whole world.

Because if that isn't so, there can't be any trust or any confidence or any truth. And that's why the law of God was full of commands just like that in verse 33.

[32 : 57] You shall not swear falsely, but you shall do to the Lord what you've sworn. In other words, truth is vitally important to God. And it's vitally important to us too.

Because when trust breaks down, it takes a very long time to rebuild that, doesn't it? Whether it's in a personal relationship, whether it's in financial relationships, diplomatic relationships, and all the rest.

That's the root of the financial crises that have gripped the world since 2008. It's all been about a loss of trust. And it's become so deep-rooted that banks all over the world won't lend and people won't borrow.

Despite everything that the government is trying to do to make that happen, interest rates are at rock bottom. The chancellor is constantly wanting people to save less and spend more to boost our consumer economy.

Now, apart from it being fundamentally immoral, it's not working, is it? People are saving more because they don't trust the government and they don't trust the banks not to doodle them, not to move the goalposts, not to wreck their pension prospects.

[34 : 03] A financial crisis is a trust crisis. It's a truth crisis. Listen to what Professor Neil Ferguson, the Harvard Economic Historian, says.

Money, he says, is a matter of belief, even faith. Belief in the person paying us, belief in the person issuing the money he uses, or the institution that honors his checks or transfers.

Money is not metal. Money is trust inscribed. He talks in his book about money, about the financial sophistication of ancient Babylon and other empires.

But he says this, the foundation on which all of this rested was the underlying credibility of a borrower's promise to repay. It's no coincidence that in English the root of credit is credo, the Latin for I believe.

See, the credibility of a promise, the word of truth that you can trust. You see, the natural human heart wants to say, well, okay, that's the law.

[35 : 06] Promises must be honored. But sometimes that's jolly inconvenient. So how can I avoid keeping my promises to my advantage at times?

That's why the rabbis also had developed a whole elaborate theology of oaths. It went sort of like this. Well, if you swear by this, then you absolutely must keep your promise.

Perhaps you swear by heaven or by your head. But if you swear instead by that, let's say you swear by Jerusalem or you swear by the earth, well, that's not binding at all and you can totally ignore that. It's like making a promise with your fingers crossed behind your back. I really mean it. Honest, honest, honest. Of course, the person that you're making the promise to doesn't know that you're doing that. But that's their problem.

So it's like the lifetime guarantee that you get on your new double-glazed windows so often. And of course, when the windows start to leak and the problem arises, you phone up the company and, oh, what do you know? It's gone bust.

[36 : 06] And the man who ran it has now opened a new company. But that's a new company and doesn't have to guarantee the old company's windows anymore. How convenient. Or on a far bigger scale, the corporate bonds that default all over the world because debtors can't pay the dues they promised.

When they issued the bonds, they promised to pay the coupon. But then you find well that when things got tight, they wouldn't have the earnings to do that. Now, the whole reason that oaths are in our world, the whole reason we have contracts and bonds and affidavits and all the rest, is because human beings are so often liars.

But of course, just because they are often liars, they'll find endless ways of getting around delivering, even on the contracts and the promises and the things they swear to.

But Jesus sweeps aside all that double-dealing, all that hypocrisy. It is not about oaths and what you swear by and forms of words you should be considering.

It's about truth. It's about fidelity. That is what God wants from you. Well, our world certainly needs a lot more of that, doesn't it? Isn't dishonesty and distrust and double-talk just all around us today? [37 : 22] Broken agreements between nations and allies. Broken promises in business and finance. Spin and half-truths in diplomacy and in public life and politics and the media.

Goodness me, the Brexiteers and the Bremeners every single day in our papers doing battle. And Jeremiah says, They bend their tongues like a bow.

Falsehood, not truth, has grown strong in the land. Truth is hard to find, isn't it? Faithfulness is a pretty rare commodity in our culture today, it seems.

Ask the Hillsborough families. 27 years to get truth from the police, from the judiciary, the guardians of truth and justice in our society.

It's a long time, isn't it, since a businessman's word was his bond. And that's why the lawyers have grown fat on it, especially the corporate lawyers, as well as the divorce lawyers.

[38 : 24] But not so in my kingdom, says Jesus. Among my people, radical fidelity must rule. And the world must see and experience faithfulness and truthfulness and absolute integrity in people's lives.

In every part. By the way, Jesus isn't teaching Christians here that they've got to refuse to take a public oath, for example, in court if they're required to.

Some people have thought that made an issue of refusing to do that. It's just to misunderstand what he's saying here. No, he's simply saying that Christian people should be seen and known by everybody to be honest. And to be people who have no need to resort to oaths themselves to try and prove their own honesty.

Well, won't the world notice that kind of radical fidelity and faithfulness in all dealings, private and public? It's certainly noticed before.

In another of his books, Neil Ferguson charts the rise and the dominance of Western culture in Northern Europe and America since their Protestant Reformation 500 years ago.

[39 : 36] And although he himself is an atheist, it's striking. He identifies one of the key factors, indeed probably the key factor, of the dominance of the West as being the Protestant Reformation, the Protestant Christianity.

Its emphasis on reading the Bible and teaching the Bible and ordinary people knowing the Bible gave birth to a huge burst of literacy and learning and commerce and all kinds of things.

And Neil Ferguson, the atheist, says, The Protestant work ethic gave rise to a measure of stability and duty to balance the dynamic and potentially unstable values created by competition in a consumer society.

But he notes rather gravely for us that that Christian emphasis is being increasingly abandoned in the so-called Christian West today with disastrous consequences.

And with the Christian emphasis on delayed gratification and thrift eroded, he says that we are living through in our day an experiment in what he calls capitalism without saving.

[40 : 42] And he says the financial crisis was a crisis made in the Western world as a result of overconsumption and excess financial leverage. And a huge loss of trust abounds.

By contrast, in his book he points to another part of the world where the Protestant work ethic is being seen and felt more and more. In a place where huge economic growth and the rise of Christian influence, he says, are happening together as no coincidence.

He's talking about China. In a remarkable passage in his book, he speaks at length about the city of Wenzhou, south of Shanghai, a city of more than 8 million people, which is supposed to be known as being the most entrepreneurial city in China.

And he says this. Isn't this striking? The seeds the British missionaries planted 150 years ago have belatedly sprouted in the most extraordinary fashion. He says back in 2002, that's nearly 15 years ago, 14% of the population of Wenzhou were Christian, and today it's surely higher.

And that fact, he says, seems vitally related to his success in business and commerce. He quotes from one of Wenzhou's top businessmen who's a Christian.

[41 : 58] That's what he says. Trust is in short supply in China today, he told me. But Zhang feels he can trust his fellow Christians because he knows they're both hardworking and honest.

Just as in Protestant Europe and America in the days of the Industrial Revolution, religious communities double as both credit networks and supply chains of creditworthy, trustworthy fellow believers.

And this is recognized by others, he says, not just Christians. Even Chinese communist officials see what a culture of truth and fidelity and trust produces. And they see where it comes from.

Listen to this from a fellow of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. We were asked to look into what accounted for the preeminence of the West all over the world.

At first, we thought it was because you had more powerful guns than us. Then we thought it was because you have the best political system. But in the past 20 years, we've realized that the heart of your culture is your religion, Christianity.

[43 : 03] That is why the West has been so powerful. The Christian moral foundation of social and cultural life was what made possible the emergence of capitalism and then the successful transition to democratic politics.

We don't have any doubt about this. Isn't that astonishing? And then he quotes another Chinese professor. Economic viability requires a serious moral ethos, more than just hedonistic consumerism and dishonest strategy.

Now here it is. The impact of real kingdom morality seen and felt on this earth, at least in parts of China today.

But alas, less and less it seems in the so-called Christian West today. Is that because, as one writer has said, while Christians in the East have brought their faith into the workplace, Christians in the West have left their faith in church.

But you see, friends, Jesus says to us here, let your radical fidelity be seen and heard and felt wherever you live and wherever you work and wherever you do business with everyone.

[44 : 20] Verse 37, let your yes be yes and let your nay be nay and let everyone know that that is so. Truth, trust, fidelity, faithfulness, heaven's radical faithfulness, visible and tangible now on this earth in Christ's people.

Not just vital for the church, but vital for our whole world's survival, let alone its transformation and ultimate renewal. Now do you see how these two paragraphs are so closely related?

Public fidelity and private fidelity go together. Of course they do. That's why it's such a nonsense to say that a public figure's private life is nobody's business. What rubbish!

If a politician will cheat on his wife and his family, do you think he'll hesitate a moment before cheating on his voters and constituents? That's why in the New Testament, in Christian leadership and in the church, it's so clear a Christian leader must be a man who's faithful to his wife and to his family and who manages his own household.

If he can't be trusted there, how on earth can God trust him with the church, which is the bride of Christ? That's kingdom righteousness, according to Jesus.

[45 : 44] Real kingdom morality. The manners of heaven. The manners of the family of our Heavenly Father. It's all about right relationships that show radical love and radical purity and radical faithfulness.

Inwardly and outwardly. In personal life and in public life. In the most inclusive and in the most exclusive of all of our human relationships.

That's heavenly relationships here on earth now. That's real righteousness. Being perfect as our Heavenly Father also is perfect.

Do you feel exposed by what the Lord Jesus teaches us here? I feel like I'm standing here naked and I want to run away. These words are deeply searching, aren't they?

They're devastating to our pride. That's certain. How can we be like this even when we want to be? There's only one way, isn't there?

[46 : 52] There's only one way, isn't there? There's only one way, isn't there? And that's to come humbly again and again to the Lord Jesus for the grace and mercy that we need to be this way. It's not for the proud.

How can it be? But it is, says Jesus, for the poor in spirit, for the humble, for the meek, for those who long for this heavenly righteousness to be theirs and to be real in their life so as to honor the Father in heaven whose greatness we love and we cherish.

It is for the heaven, says Jesus. And so it can be for us, for each one of us. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Only Jesus can take you to the heart of God's law and to the righteousness that it so truly expresses.

Because only Jesus can take us right to the very heart of the heavenly Father whose grace and mercy we so desperately need if we're to be thus.

[48 : 02] You simply can't do it any other way than with Him. But He is faithful. And you can trust Him today and always.

So don't let anything and don't let anyone ever keep you away from that relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

O God, the protector of all that trust in Thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy that Thou, being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal.

Grant this, O Heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ, our Lord's sake. Amen.