

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Attitude Behind the Act

Scripture: Matthew 5:21

Code: 2213

Tonight, I want I you to look with me at Matthew chapter 5, and we come to the section beginning in verse 21. This very important, very misunderstood, often misrepresented and misinterpreted section of Scripture will be our occupation for many weeks to come. Because from verse 21 through verse 48, we have critical statements by our Lord as He interprets the Old Testament law. And there are six specific themes that He deals with in the section.

And tonight we're simply going to introduce the concept that our Lord has in mind in this passage, and in the following weeks discuss in detail these specific sections. And just simply tonight we'll entitle it "The Attitude Behind the Act." We won't get to the subject of murder, which is the first theme. We'll just discuss the general thrust, the attitude behind the act.

Now most people evaluate their lives and the lives of other people on external appearance. First Samuel 16:7 says, "Man looketh on the outward appearance." Jesus said in John 7:24, "Judge not according to the appearance, but righteous judgment." In 2 Corinthians 10, the apostle Paul said, "Do you look on things after the outward appearance? We dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves."

There are people who commend themselves on the basis of their outward appearance. There are people who are satisfied with how they behave externally. There are people who evaluate others on the basis of what they see, visibly, on terms of religious behavior.

Now this is rather typical of fallen man. He is basically satisfied with externals. A lady recently said to me in a conversation, she said, "I'm very religious. I do many things for my religion. I'm very active. I'm a good person doing good deeds for people, especially people from other countries." And she went on to try and convince me that God was pleased with what she was doing. But 1 Samuel 16:7 says, "Man looks at the outward appearance, and God looks upon the heart."

God is not so concerned with the outside as He is with the inside. And the outside is only validated insofar as it is representative of what is on the inside. And that is, frankly, the basis of the text that lies before us. In Matthew 5:21-48, as our Lord gives standards for living in His kingdom, as He redefines and reemphasizes the divine standard given in the law of God, what He wants to say here is the inside is infinitely more revealing, infinitely more important than the outside. What you are on the inside is what God is concerned with.

Jesus emphasized here in the sermon on the mount, and frankly throughout His whole ministry, that external ceremonies, that external religious rites, that certain works are not the whole issue, that God is concerned with the heart. And that is precisely the thrust of verse 20. Look at it.

“I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Now the scribes and the Pharisees had a righteousness that was external. And what Jesus is saying is you must have one that exceeds that, which is internal. God is concerned about what you really are, not what you appear to be. It is the internal that is infinitely more important than the external. That is essentially what verse 20 means.

The righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees was an external, ceremonial, ritualistic, hypocritical legalism. And the righteousness that God demands is something internal. And, by the way, it's always been God's concern. It isn't anything new. Jesus isn't articulating something never before known. In 1 Kings 8:39, the Scripture said, “Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and give to every man according to his ways, - ” listen to this “ - whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, *even* thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men;)” And so God is enjoined in that verse to respond to men not on the basis of outward deeds, but on the basis of the heart, which God alone knows.

In 1 Chronicles 28:9 - also in the Old Testament - the Scripture says, “And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.” The same emphasis. God is concerned with the inside not the outside.

Second Chronicles 16:9, “For the eyes of the Lord runneth to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of *them* whose heart *is* perfect toward Him.” Psalm 7:9, “The righteous God testeth the minds and hearts.” Proverbs 16:2, “All the ways of a man *are* clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weighs the spirit.” A man may justify his ways, but God will weigh his spirit.

Jeremiah 17:10, God says, “I the Lord search the heart, / test the conscious, even to give every man according to his ways, *and* according to the fruit of his doings.” And Revelation 2:23, the last book in the Bible, reiterates the same principle. “I am He - ” says Christ “ - Who searches the minds and hearts: and I will give to everyone of you according to your works.”

Now the standard that God set - and people, this is really critical - the standard that God sets to evaluate men and women is the standard of the heart. The message is clear. God is concerned with external behavior. Yes, absolutely, yes. But it is only justified insofar as it is the outgrowth of internal righteousness, for God evaluates the heart.

Now this powerful section in verses 21 to 48 will call us to examine our hearts repeatedly. Our Lord is describing the citizens of His kingdom here. First, He gives a description of the essential nature of a kingdom citizen. He did that in the first 12 verses of chapter 5. He described the character of a true believer, of a true child of God, of a true kingdom citizen. Back to verse 3. They are poor in spirit. They mourn over sin. They are meek. They hunger and thirst after righteousness. They are merciful. They are pure in heart. They are peacemakers. They will be persecuted. They will be reviled. But they will also rejoice.

And He gave us a clear description of the character of a kingdom citizen. We saw the tremendous truths in those beatitudes. He gave us standard for excellence that the external religion of the scribes and Pharisees couldn't even approach. The scribes and Pharisees were not poor in spirit. They did not mourn. They were not meek. They did not hunger and thirst after righteousness. They were not merciful. They were not pure in heart. They were not peacemakers. All of those are internal attitudes. All of those are elements of character. Theirs was purely external. They had none of the real qualities of a kingdom citizen. And so the Lord gave the standards, internal characteristics, to delineate those who were truly His children.

Then, in verses 13 to 16, He went on to show how people with that kind of character function in the world. And He pointed out two things. They become salt in verse 13, and they become light in verse 14. People who live that way salt the earth, light the world. They are the only hope for society. They are the only hope for the truth reaching lost man. And so He has said this is what God requires. It's internal character. And this is how God uses people with that kind of character.

Now at this point, He shows how such people living by such principles relate to the Old Testament law. Why? Because this is critical to the Jews listening to Him speak. Because so far, what He has said is revolutionary to them. Theirs is purely external religion, and He has laid down axioms that are not common to their understanding of religion. And so their question at this time is, "Well, this is well and good but how does it relate to the Old Testament? How does it relate to Moses? How does it relate to the rabbis have taught? How does it relate to the system of traditional law that we ascribe to?"

The Jews to whom Jesus was preaching would lean so totally on the teachings related to their own Judaistic law that our Lord couldn't bypass this section. He has to show how this relates to their system. And really verse 20 is the key. He says, "God's standard is higher than yours. What you now know as a righteous standard is unacceptable."

Now they're going to immediately say, "Wait a minute. We obey the law of God." And in essence, Jesus is saying, "I have to redefine the law of God for you because it's been lost in the midst of your tradition." So that, in fact - and I want you to get this - the Judaism of the time was far from that true

Old Testament law which God had given.

And so Jesus is saying essentially in verse 17, "I am not here to destroy the law. I am not here to destroy the prophets. In fact, until heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or tittle shall in any way pass from this law. And I'm not going to tolerate anybody who sets aside one of God's commands, but what you have is not God's standard. What you have is not God's law. And so I will redefine it for you."

And frankly, that's exactly what He does through the rest of chapter 5, chapter 6, and chapter 7. All three of these chapters are Jesus' explanation of what He said in verses 17 through 20. How does all of this new information, how do these beatitudes relate to the Old Testament? How do they relate to the Judaism extant at that time? How do they relate to what these Jews knew as their system of religion? Jesus said, "It isn't God's law I'm setting aside. You've lost God's law in the midst of your tradition, and I'm about to set God's law back in its primary place." And that is precisely what He does in chapter 5, chapter 6, and chapter 7.

Now let's see how He goes about it in chapter 5. Look at verse 21. And watch this common occurrence. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of judgment." Stop right there. Jesus says, "You have heard it said, but I say unto you."

Now look at verse 27. "You have heard that it was said by them of old, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart." Again, He says, "You have heard it said, but I say unto you."

Look at verse 31. "It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, except for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery." Same formula. "You've heard it said, but I say."

Verse 33, again, "Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old, Thou shalt not perjure thyself, but shall perform under the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all." Verse 38, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, Ye shall resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."

And finally in verse 43, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies."

Now listen, six specific illustrations. Now I want you to get this. We will deal with these separately and you're going to find them absolutely fascinating as we get into them. But for just an overview, let me tell you this. This series is so critical that it demands a careful look, and we're going to spend our time

diligently, carefully, precisely examining every one of these practical, confronting, life-changing principles that our Lord gives.

They are really important. They deal with murder. They deal with lust. They deal with divorce. They deal with what you say. They deal with speaking the truth. They deal with retaliation. They deal with loving your enemies. They are really practical.

But you must know this to begin with. They all follow a similar pattern. Jesus is saying, "Your religion teaches you this, but I say unto you." And what He's doing is this. He's not comparing Himself with the Old Testament. He's not raising the standard higher than the law of God. He's not talking about what Moses said. He's not talking about what the Old Testament said. He's not talking about what God said. He's talking about what their religious system taught them. And He's saying, "Your standard is too low. You only worry about murder. God looks at the heart and says, 'If there's hate there, it's the same thing.' You only murder or worry about fornication. God says, 'If there's lust in the heart, it's the same thing.' You see, God's standard is an attitudinal standard. Yours is only dealing with action." That's the difference.

Jesus said, "It's not only in God's eyes the man who commits murder who is guilty, but the man who is angry is just as guilty, and just as liable to be judged." Jesus said that in God's eyes, it is not only the man who commits the act of adultery who is guilty, but the one who allows the unclean desire to find root in his heart. Jesus said that in God's eyes it is not only the one who perjures himself, but anyone whose word is not his absolute bond. Jesus said that in God's sight it is not only wrong to divorce without a bill of divorcement, but it is wrong to divorce without a just cause. Jesus said that in God's sight not only is there to be justice, but there is to be mercy. Jesus said that we are not only to love our neighbors, but God says we are to love our enemies.

And what He's doing is listing the law, stripping it of the traditional barnacles of rabbinic confusion, elevating it to where it belongs, and saying, "You cannot get away with justification on the basis of externals because you didn't murder, or because you didn't commit adultery, or because you didn't divorce, or because you didn't perjure yourself, or because you did what was just, or because you loved your neighbor. That is not enough. Those are only the externals. The internals are what God is looking after."

Now in selecting His illustrations He's very careful. First of all, He chooses two commands from Moses, from the decalogue, the ten commandments. Thou shalt not murder. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Then, He chooses two other rather wider social commandments taken from other portions of the Mosaic writings. Social relationships.

He starts with the very firm ten commandments. He broadens to social relationships, and finally He broadens to discuss the whole subject of love. It's almost as if there's an ascending thing here. He's

saying that it all begins at the foundation of life: Murder and marriage, the organism, the individual, the organization marriage. It all starts there. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. One is the right of the individual, and the other is the basic definition of the social system. God has standards right there. And they're not only behavior standards in terms of what you do, but of what you think.

And from those very basic things He moves to a wider set of social relationships and He talks about things like truth, and justice, and honesty. And finally to the widest possible attitude, which is love. And so there is a three-fold progress from the lower to a higher. He starts with an individual dealing with an individual. And then in a family with marriage. And then expands to the whole category of truth, and love, and justice, and honesty. And finally to the category of love, which reaches as wide as not only your neighbor, but your enemy.

And He says in all of human living, from the individual in his sanctity, to the family, to social relationships, to the wide world of our enemies, we should be characteristically righteous on the inside. And your religious system doesn't have that definition. So therefore, your righteousness in order to please God "must exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees." Theirs is strictly external.

And so the Lord Jesus Christ - don't think it for a minute - did not come to set aside the law of God. He came to strip the rabbinic barnacles off the law of God, to make it bare, and naked, and pure as it was when God gave it, and lift it back to where it belongs. God had always been concerned with attitudes, always. That isn't anything new. But the people of Israel had lowered the standard and then justified themselves by what they didn't do, while their hearts were full of murder, full of lust, full of lies, full of hate, full of anger. And yet they were self-righteous, because they had lowered the standard to accommodate their abilities. Jesus lifted it right back where it belonged.

And what our Lord is saying is this. Thoughts are just as important as deeds. That's why no man can be justified on his own. You may not do the deed, but if you thought the thought you're damned. That's what He is saying. He is literally devastating the Pharisees. He is saying, "I don't accept your externals. Your heart is rotten."

And in Matthew 23 later on He says, "Outside you're whitewashed. Inside you're like a tomb full of dead *men's* bones." And so a man is not to be judged by his deeds so much as by his desires; a woman not to be judged by her actions as much as her attitudes. This is different than the world's standards. For the scribes and Pharisees you see a man or woman was righteous if they never did the forbidden thing. They didn't care about their thoughts. They didn't care about attitudes. But Jesus said, "A man is righteous if he never desires the forbidden things."

Patrick Fairbairn says, and it's worth reading, listen to it. "In the revelation of law there was a substratum of grace recognized in the words that prefaced the ten commandments and promises of grace and blessing, also intermingled with the stern prohibitions and injunctions of which they consist. And so inversely, in the sermon on the mount, while it gives grace the priority and the prominence such as in the beatitudes, it is far from excluding the severer part of God's character and government. No sooner, indeed, has grace poured itself forth in a succession of beatitudes than there appears the stern demands of righteousness and law." Listen.

God is not saying, "You're a Christian. You're free. Do whatever you want." God is saying, "You are a child of the kingdom. Then the standard is raised for you, not lowered." The standards are still there. God hasn't changed. And God examines the heart to see the attitudes.

Look with me for a moment to 1 Corinthians chapter 4, 1 Corinthians 4. I just want to make a couple of comments. Verse 3, a very key passage. Listen to what it says. "But with me - " Paul says. He's talking here about his ministry, about the fact that God has made him a servant, and a steward, and he knows that the Corinthians are critical of him. And so he says, "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you, or by man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self." Now stop there for a minute.

Paul is saying, "Look, I will not allow myself to settle for human evaluation. I won't do it. Not yours and not mine." I can identify with that. Because I tend to be biased in my own favor, right? So do you. Sometimes people will come and say oh, you know, such complimentary things, such gracious things, such kind words, and I'm appreciative of those. But I, for me, it is a small thing how you evaluate me.

"It is a small thing whether you evaluate me negatively, whether you evaluate me positively. I don't feel it's necessary to answer my critics, and I certainly don't want to believe those who are kind. That's a small thing. I don't even evaluate myself. Why? Because you, whether you're critical or kind, me whether I'm critical or kind, don't really know the secrets of the heart."

I know a little more than you, but I don't know the whole picture. Because even when I find myself justifying myself it's only because my report is incomplete. And so in verse 4, Paul says, "I know nothing against myself; - " I mean, I've checked around and I can't find anything wrong " - yet am I not by that justified: - " even though there's nothing there that I can see is wrong, that doesn't justify me " - He that judges me is the Lord."

I can see the externals. You can see them. You can say, "Oh, on the outside everything is good, on the outside it's wonderful, on the outside it's fine." Or on the outside it may even look bad to you. You may say, "Boy, so-and-so is out of line. Look what they're doing on the outside. Boy, they're out of line."

I'll never forget one time when I was in college and I was at a school where they had so many rules that they couldn't even read them in a whole year. There were so many rules that you could break them and not even know they existed. They passed out books on it. And I remember one time a guy was called to the high tribunal of this school, and he was told, "You have broken the cardinal rule. We saw you leaving the campus with a blond in a blue dress sitting next to you in your car. Where were you going?"

Now in this particular thing, you couldn't go anywhere with a girl. You couldn't leave the campus in your car. This was a horrendous crime of the first order. To which the young man replied, "That was my blue laundry bag, and hanging out of it was a yellow towel." By that time, the rumor was long gone that here was a dissolute young man who was seen driving around with a blond in a blue dress.

It is a small thing, frankly, how you see the picture. It is a small thing, be it critical or positive. It is a small thing whether I justify myself. It is the Lord that judges me. "Therefore - " verse 5 says " - judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the - " I'll substitute a word " - motives of the hearts." You see? You can stop right there. That's the point.

When God judges righteous judgment, He judges motive. He judges inside. You may be one who goes through life and you never struck a blow to anyone. Why you've never killed anybody, you've never even fought with anybody, but you literally burn inside with anger. You may be one who's never been unfaithful in your marriage, but you cultivate the thoughts of adultery repeatedly. You may be one who's never perjured yourself in a court of law, and yet your word is not really your bond. You don't always follow through, and in your heart you say things you never mean to keep. That's what God is looking at. You may want so bad to do something and all your life never do it. And God says it's as if you did it. And God judges the evil desire.

And so, you see, Jesus is literally hitting these Pharisees right between the eyes. Their hearts were filthy while their deeds were religious. And God looks at the heart. Patrick Fairbairn again says, "The scribes and Pharisees of that age had completely inverted the order of things. Their carnality and self-righteousness had led them to exalt the precepts respecting ceremonial observances to the highest places and to throw the duties inculcated in the ten commandments into the background." They just dealt with externals. The state of the heart was not their concern, but it was Jesus' concern.

Look at our society. They do this all the time. Oh, so-and-so is such a good person. Oh, so-and-so is so charitable. We hear this all the time. But only God knows what's going on inside. Only God knows what motives are behind what we do.

Now the key statement here, as we saw - let's look at the text again in Matthew 5. The key statement that we saw, and we'll see it all the way through, is, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old," verse 21. Now there is a slight variation in the form but that's basically the way it is in each of the six incidents. In a couple of them it is abbreviated, but it essentially says the same thing.

Now there are two possibilities with this. I want you to notice this, get a little Bible study here that will be helpful. It could read, "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old," or, "by them of old." It could be either way. If it was "to," it would probably refer to the Bible, the law of Moses, the Old Testament. "You have heard that it was said to them of old." But, "you have heard that it was said by them of old," indicates that it isn't the Bible speaking to the people, but some antiquity, some ancient people speaking, "by them of old."

Frankly, "by them" is the proper rendering. I think the Authorized is right in using that for several reasons. I don't think we should make it the law of Moses. Jesus isn't saying, "You have heard that it was said to them of old by Moses or by God, but I'm saying this," or He'd be contradicting God. He'd be contradicting Moses. He'd be contradicting the Old Testament. Set aside the law. Set aside the prophets. And that would be ridiculous because in verse 17 He just said He wouldn't do that. So it isn't Moses and the law He's referring to.

By the way, if it was Moses, I think He would have said, "You have heard that Moses commanded," or, "You have heard that it is written," because that's what He said in chapter 4 three times when He referred to the Old Testament. And in chapter 8 of Matthew when He refers to the Old Testament, He says, "Moses commanded." So His way of referring to the Old Testament in the first 8 chapters of Matthew is, "Moses said," or, "It is written." This statement is not used to refer to the Old Testament.

And by the way, rabbis were called "fathers of antiquity" or "men of long ago." That was a common term for rabbis, and that is what our Lord is referring to. "You have heard that it was said by the rabbis of old." In other words, this is a designation related to their oral teaching that glossed over the true law of God, that added their own thoughts to the revelation of the Old Testament. And so Jesus is not contrasting the New Testament with the Old Testament, not contrasting His Word with God's Word, but with the word of the rabbis, and their traditional interpretation which had been given to the people.

Now let me give you an illustration of this. Martyn Lloyd-Jones uses this, and I think it's a good illustration. The condition of the Jew at this time is fascinating. Now listen to this. It is remarkably like the people in the Reformation. Let me tell you why. In the days of the Reformation prior to the time when the Reformation really hit, the Scriptures were not translated into the peoples' language, into English, for example.

When you went to the Catholic Church, the Catholic Mass - which really until the Reformation had captured the whole religious, Christian religious world - the whole thing was in what language? Latin,

Latin. So you went there and you sat there. There was no Bible to speak of in the hands of the people. And what was read by the priests was read in Latin. Nobody understood it. Nobody read it. And then the priest would expound upon this Latin text and the people would simply believe whatever the priest said because they had no basis by which to evaluate. They couldn't read the Latin. They couldn't interpret it. So they accepted what the priest said.

So century went by after century, and the Roman Catholic Church developed the system which was never really investigated by the people. All because they didn't have the Bible in their own language. And so they accepted the priestly interpretations and conformity to the system of Rome.

What the Reformation did more than anything else was give the Bible to the people. It put the Word of God in the peoples' hands. When they began to read the Scripture, then they began to see the false system, the false teaching, the misrepresentation of the gospel, which had been given to them for centuries, and centuries, and centuries. And the truth of the gospel shattered the Dark Ages, and Christianity as we know it today was born out of that. And today, we have the Bible. And we can check any false system because we, too, can understand it.

Well, that's exactly what was going on in our Lord's Day. Listen to this. When Israel had gone into captivity in Babylon, when they went in to the Babylonian captivity, they remained there seventy years. And during that time historians tell us for the most part they lost the Hebrew language. They ceased to speak Hebrew. They picked up a language known as Aramaic. And so when they came back from captivity, they spoke in Aramaic. In Jesus time, they spoke Aramaic. Jesus taught, probably, in Aramaic.

And of course, the New Testament was written down in Greek. But the people, the Jewish people spoke Aramaic. They were for the most part completely unfamiliar with Hebrew, as Jewish people are for the most part today. So, the rabbis would come along. The rabbis would read the Hebrew, which the people didn't understand. The rabbis would interpret it. The people couldn't argue because they didn't know what it said, either. And so they begin to build an entire system based upon the ignorance of the people regarding the Hebrew text.

And so when the Lord says, "You have heard that it was said by them of old," He is saying, "The religion you have is the oral tradition of the rabbis, not the written Word of God," you see? Very critical. The embellishments, and traditions, and interpretations, and deletions, and additions, and all of the garbage that was added which became the Mishnah, the codification of oral law, the Talmud, and all of that other stuff, which padded the truth of God into obscurity.

Jesus says, "That's what you've been hearing." Just as the Roman Catholic Church obliterated the truth by keeping the people ignorant of the Scriptures, so the people were ignorant of the Scriptures in the time of the rabbis. And because they couldn't speak Hebrew, they couldn't verify what they

were getting.

And so our Lord comes along and says, "I am here to loose the law of God from the shackles of rabbinic mishmash." And most significantly, He attacks their emphasis on external works righteousness. And so He says, "You have heard it said by them of old," and then He says in verse 22, "but I say unto you - " And, beloved, here He sets Himself up as the authority. This is tremendous. He says, "I tell you what God's law is." This literally shattered the people. They couldn't handle this. They were shocked.

They said of Him, "He taught as one having authority, not as the Scribes," Mark 1:22. In Matthew 7, as He concluded His sermon, they said, "He taught as *one* having authority, and not as the scribes." Twice that is said. They couldn't believe that He would stand up and say that. They were shocked for someone to set himself as equal to the law of God. Oh, my.

You see, the Jews felt that this traditional law, which they believed to be the law of God was so sacred. Philo said, for example, "Only Moses' decrees are everlasting, unchangeable, unshakeable." The rabbis said, "Those who deny that the law is from heaven have no part in the world to come." So they believed this was the only law, and that eternal destiny was dependent upon this law. And here comes Jesus along and He says, "I say this," and He never quoted a rabbi, and He never quoted a group of rabbis, and He never quoted anything but His own authoritative statement, and they were literally shocked.

Do you know the first act of a synagogue? If you were to go to a synagogue in Jesus' time to worship on the Sabbath, the very first thing a service would do, you'd come in and sit down - men on one side, women on the other - and a man would go up to the front and he would scoop up all of the scrolls of the Old Testament, and he would walk all the way around the synagogue, all the way around the synagogue in silence, so that the congregation would reverence the law of God. And Jesus stands up and says, "I say unto you - " and they were devastated.

Who are You? The prophets always said, "Thus saith the Lord." The rabbis said, "There is a teaching that says." But Jesus said, "I say unto you." And William Barkley says, "Clearly one of two things must be true. Either Jesus is mad, or unique. Either He is a megalomaniac, or else He is the Son of God. No ordinary person would claim what He claimed." He claims the authority of God. Devastating. And He strips all of the garbage off and lifts God's law back where it belongs.

Now let me close this introduction by summarizing the key principles He's teaching in the passage. Principle one - and I want you to remember that these are the things that are in the mind of Jesus in this whole section. Number one, it is the spirit of the law that is the priority, not the letter. It is the spirit of the law that is the priority, not the letter. The law, beloved, is not mechanical. That's what Jesus is saying.

It is not simply functional. It is the inside that God is concerned about. You can be all white on the outside and a wretched, vile grave on the inside. It is not the letter. The letter kills. It is the Spirit that gives life. God is not looking for externals. He's looking for changed hearts. The scribes and Pharisees thought that because they didn't murder, they were all right, but they hated. And because they didn't commit adultery they were all right, but they had evil thoughts. And their religion was legalistic, phony, hypocrisy of the worst kind that damns the soul. Conformity to God's law is a matter of the heart, not simply a matter of the outside.

Oh, what a lesson this is to us who tend, too, to justify ourselves. In Luke 16:15 Jesus said to the Pharisees, "Ye are they who justify yourselves before men; but God knows your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." Men and God judge differently about you.

You know, you can come to Grace Church, you can play the game, talk the talk, do the works in the energy of the flesh, and justify yourself in your own eyes, and in the eyes of others, and be an abomination to God because your heart is full of corruption. That's what He is saying. It is the spirit of the law that is the priority, not the letter.

Second principle, the law is not just negative, it is also positive. The law of God is not just to prevent us from doing certain things, its real object is to lead us to right attitudes. It is a positive thing. You're not justified by not doing certain things, but you are justified by thinking certain ways, positive righteousness. They were concerned with what they didn't do. God was concerned with what they did do inside. Did they hunger after righteousness? Did they thirst after righteousness? Did they seek to be merciful? Were they pure in heart? Did they mourn over their sin? Were they poor in terms of spirit? Were they peacemakers? That's what God was concerned with. This is spiritual character. Positive, not just negative.

Third principle, the law is not an end in itself. Get it? The law is not an end in itself. It has a purpose. What is the goal of the law? It isn't just an end to itself. Listen, the Pharisees said, "The goal of the law is to glorify me when I keep the law." Look at me, see how righteous I am. But the end of the law was to glorify God. Don't ask yourself, "Have I kept all the laws today?"

Ask yourself, "Have I glorified God in my spirit today? Have I glorified God in my desires today? Have I glorified God in my wants and wishes today? Have I been free from phoniness? Have I had a pure heart that had no thought of evil, or anger, or hatred, or bitterness, or lust, or unrighteousness? To the glory of God? The end of the law is not to justify me. That is the way the Pharisees saw it. It's to glorify God.

John Calvin in his *Institutes* makes this tremendous statement. “Let us agree that through the law man’s life is molded not only to outward honesty, but to inward and spiritual righteousness. Although no one can deny this, very few duly note it. This happens because they do not look to the law giver by whose character the nature of the law is to be appraised.”

Listen. “If some king by edict forbids fornication, murder or theft, I admit,” says Calvin, “that a man who doesn’t commit such acts will not be bound by the penalty. That is because the mortal lawgiver’s jurisdiction extends only to the outward political order. But God, whose eye nothing escapes, and who is concerned not so much with outward appearance as with purity of heart, forbids not only fornication, murder, and theft but lust, anger, hatred, coveting, and deceit. For since He is a spiritual lawgiver, He speaks no less to the soul than He does to the body.” End quote. What Calvin means is if you think God’s laws are only external, then you don’t know the character of God.

A fourth principle, God alone can judge men. God alone can judge men. Listen. He alone sees the secrets of the heart. He knows you. He knows if you’re really a Christian or if playing a game. He knows if you’re really carnal or spiritual as a believer. He knows. He knows whether it’s just a matter of acts or attitudes. He knows whether the heart matches the outside.

Only God knows the secrets of the heart. We read that in 1 Corinthians chapter 4. In Hebrews 4:12, “The word of God *is* alive and powerful.” And it says it’s “a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature not manifest in His sight: all things *are* naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”

God knows everything. But, oh, the next verse says, “We have a faithful, sympathetic high priest, and let us come boldly before the throne of grace to seek mercy in time of need.” Isn’t it great? God knows our hearts. He knows if they’re rotten, but He stands with His arms open as a sympathetic high priest ready to give us grace and mercy.

God alone can judge the heart. And tell me this, isn’t it true? Many a man and woman can stand the judgment of men but will fall before the discerning eye of God? You better examine your own heart.

A final principle, every person is commanded to live up to divine standards. That’s right. Every person. Every person is commanded to live up to divine standards. “I say unto you, Unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will in no way enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Chapter 5 closes with this, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect.” Every person in the world is required to live up to that standard. You say, “You’ve got to be kidding.” I’m not kidding. I’m not kidding. You mean I have to live to that standard with a pure inside as well as a right outside? Yes. You say, “But I can’t.” You’re right. You are absolutely right.

And that's why the apostle Paul gave the solution in Romans chapter 3. Romans 3:10, "There is none righteous - " what's the rest of the verse? "No not one." You say, "John, Christ set a standard I can't obtain." And so says Paul in verse 21, "The righteousness of God is apart from the law manifested." How? "Even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith in Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe."

Did you get it? You can't be that righteous. But listen, Christ is that righteous, and He gives His righteousness to those who believe. Isn't that great? God sets the standard. You can't live up to it. And God says, "My son is not only the lawgiver, but He is the Redeemer who makes it possible for you to live on that level."

Beloved, it's a fantastic thing. The standard is so high we can't obtain it. Christ met the standard and imputes to us his righteousness. Apart from the law, we couldn't keep the law. Oh, what a blessed thing.

You look at your heart and you say the outside's not bad. The inside is rotten. And if God did what was right, He would consume you in a blast of His fury. But because He's a merciful and gracious God, He makes His lawgiver not just a lawgiver, but a Redeemer. And Jesus perfectly kept the law, and He imputes His righteousness to us, so that when God looks at believers He sees the righteousness of Jesus Christ covering that person. And I stand before God as righteous as Christ.

But, beloved, you can't even have that gift of righteousness unless you recognize that what you need is that gift of righteousness. As long as you live your life justifying yourself on your external behavior, you'll never come to the desperation that reaches out and accepts the gift of righteousness.

The great preacher of many years ago, Henry Ward Beecher, had a clock in this church that didn't keep good time. It was always too fast or too slow. And he fiddled with it month, after month, after month trying to get it right, and it became kind of a standard topic of conversation in the church. And, finally, in desperation, he put a sign over the clock that said, "Don't blame the hands, the trouble lies deeper." That's how it is in life, isn't it? Don't blame the hands, the trouble lies deeper. And until you deal with the deeper trouble, it isn't going to change the hands. Let's pray.

Father, we know that only the righteousness of Jesus Christ can grant us the power to fulfill the law of God. Only the righteousness of Jesus Christ can grant to us what we could never gain, what we could never earn. The standard is so high which makes the gift so wonderful. Lord Jesus, help us to take that gift and then, Lord, as Christians, help us to live without hypocrisy, being on the inside what we feign to be on the outside, and doing it all for Your glory. For Jesus' sake, amen.

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