

The Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 5–7

A Christian’s Righteousness – 5:17-48 (Part 1)

The Bible speaks of two types of righteousness: the perfect righteousness of salvation that can only come from of Jesus ^{Isaiah 46:13, Romans 3:21-26} that is granted to born-again believers ^{John 3:1-8} as part of the the free gift of Grace ^{Ephesians 2:8-9}. However, once saved, believers are called to strive for a righteous life ^{2 Timothy 2:22-24} by using the power of the Holy Spirit ^{Ephesians 3:16-19} to do the works of God ^{Ephesians 2:10}. The deeds of the Christian will be evaluated at the Judgement Seat of Christ ^{Romans 14:10, 2 Corinthians 5:9-10}.

After defining the Christian character ^{Matthew 5:1-12} and Christian influence in the world ^{Matthew 5:13-16}, Jesus then explained Christian righteousness: the behavior they should exhibit in their life ^{Matthew 5:17-48}.

In this crucial sermon, Jesus' started in the third person ^{Matthew 5:1-12} (e.g. "**Blessed are the meek.**" ^{v.5}), He changed to the second person ^{Matthew 5:13-16} (e.g. "**You are the salt of the earth.**" ^{v.13}) and then he finished the rest of His discourse in the authoritative first person ^{Matthew 5:17-7:27} (e.g. "**I tell you.**" ^{v.20}).

CHRIST, THE CHRISTIAN AND THE LAW (5:17-20)

In these verses, Jesus defined Christian righteousness and began to speak of the relation between the Old Testament and New Testament, and between the law and the gospel. It is divided into two sections: Christ and the law ^{v.17-18} and the Christian and the law ^{v.19-20}.

5:17 This negatively-worded statement seems to indicate Jesus was responding to some who believed He was intent on replacing the OT, defined by "**the Law (and) the Prophets**" (*prophētēs*: one God speaks to and through). However, Jesus made it perfectly clear He did not come (implying a mission) to abolish (*kataluō*: to unloose what was before bound) them, but He came to fulfill (*plēroō*: to fully satisfy) them.

This is the first indication of the Jewish leadership questioning Jesus about His speaking in His own name and His own authority instead of in the name and authority of the prophets (e.g. Moses, Isaiah).

5:18 Jesus continued with a stronger statement by saying that not even the smallest letter (Hebrew *yodh*; Greek *iōta*) or the smallest embellishment of a letter (*kēraia*: horn, tittle) in Scripture will be violated before the redemption of man is complete.

The Old Testament contains (1) doctrinal teaching (*Torah*: law, which means "revealed instruction"), (2) predictive prophecy and (3) ethical precepts (moral law). Jesus fulfilled the doctrinal teachings through His teaching and His work; the prophecies by His life satisfying all of the OT anticipatory predictions; and He fulfilled the ethical precepts by His perfect life (He never violated any moral law).

In the case of the moral law, Jesus was also preparing to state His objections to the superficial interpretations of the law by the scribes, and then supply the correct/true interpretation ^{v.21-48}.

5:19 Jesus reiterated the importance/permanence of the OT commandments (moral law) in the life of the Christian by stating their position in the "**kingdom of heaven**" depends on their level of obedience to the law (i.e. the rules still apply, never for salvation, but for an obedient life). Jesus defined righteousness

Sermon on the Mount 4 – Christian’s Righteousness, Part 1

as obedience to the commandments by being a person who “**practices and teaches these commands**”. Jesus also emphasized that all (even “**the least**”) of the commandments are vital and not to be ignored.

5:20 Jesus confused the disciples by saying they must be more righteous than the professional righteous people (the Pharisees) to get into heaven, emphasizing (1) Jesus supplies salvation righteousness and (2) the difference between the wrong type of righteousness (one that is legalistic and self-oriented) and the right type of righteousness (a heart righteousness of mind and motive that is possible only after a person has been born-again by yielding to God and receiving the Holy Spirit ^{Ezekiel 36:27}).

The Pharisees had determined that the law contained 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions. This fact illustrated their emphasis was on external legalism they believed would prove their righteousness, while Jesus taught a deeper righteousness from a pure heart ^{v.8} leading to humble, obedient action.

In these four verses, Jesus made it clear that Paul’s statement: “Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes” ^{Romans 10:4} does not mean the law is no longer applicable to Christians. What it means is that the condemnation resulting from man’s inability to meet the demands of the law does not have any effect on the salvation that is granted by Jesus to His followers. His statements here actually affirm that the law will stay in force until the end of time.

The 6 lessons of Jesus in 5:21-48 contain contrasting statements with a form similar to: “**You have heard it was said...**” and “**But I tell you...**”. When Jesus used the first phrase, He was not setting Himself up against Moses (and the law itself), but against false teachings by certain scribes, Pharisees and Rabbis. In response to these traditions, Jesus used the authoritative second phrase to begin His explanation of the correct interpretation. When Jesus quoted Scripture He used the phrase “**it is written**” (*gegraptai*), again making it plain His argument was not against Scripture, but against the false teaching/tradition.

Of the six lessons, four of them are commandments, with three being negative (prohibitions) and one being positive (encouragement). The other two lessons speak about issues with guidance and permissions. The two lessons on murder and adultery will be discussed in this class and the others covered next time.

AVOIDING ANGER (5:21-26) MURDER ^{6th Commandment: Exodus 20:13 & Deuteronomy 5:17}

5:21 Jesus repeated the 6th commandment, along with a modifier from tradition “**You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgement’**”

The Pharisees intention was to limit the application of this commandment to the physical act of murder.

Note that the 6th commandment is not a prohibition against all killing, not even every killing of a human. If it did prohibit all killing, God would be a hypocrite for commanding Joshua to kill all those in Canaan, when he entered the Promised Land. The Hebrew word in the commandment that the King James Version (and others) mistranslated “kill” is *râtsach*: murder, unlawful killing with intentional malice. Furthermore, in another verse, God almost commands capital punishment: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.” ^{Genesis 9:6}

5:22 In stating the full implication of the command, Jesus made the point that even having an unjust anger (see note below) with another Christian (“his brother”) is a breach of the 6th commandment deserving

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Sermon on the Mount 4 – Christian’s Righteousness, Part 1

punishment. For example, saying “*Raca*” (Aramaic term of contempt – meaning “empty-headed” or “good for nothing”) to another believer warrants judgement, but saying “*You fool*” (*mōros*: morally worthless) is a harsh judgement of a person’s heart/character that only Jesus is capable of determining. This type of hardened heart toward another human reflects an evil wish to be rid of them, and Jesus made it clear this is serious and could indicate the individual is heading to the fires of hell (*gehenna*: Hebrew *ge hinnom* – the Valley of Hinnom: the “Valley of Slaughter” 2 Chronicles 28:1-3, 33:1-6, Jeremiah 19:1-6).

Allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture, here Jesus has to be referring to unjust (unrighteous) anger. While humans must use great heavenly discernment when it comes to anger, the Bible makes it clear that not all anger is wrong ^{1 Corinthians 13:5, Ephesians 4:26, James 1:19-20}. And, if all anger was sinful, then God would be guilty of sinning ^{Isaiah 10:5, Jeremiah 10:10, 42:18}, which is impossible ^{2 Samuel 22:31, Ezra 9:15, Psalm 145:17}.

In the next four verses, Jesus illustrated two practical applications of the principle just discussed.

5:23-24 Jesus specified God does not want a genuine Christian coming to Him with a gift at the altar (or even simply to worship) without first attempting to reconcile with another believer that they have wronged.

5:25 When a believer has wronged a non-believer, and is being held accountable (by being taken to court), God expects the believer to approach them with an offer that is more than fair in an attempt to settle the dispute quickly, because otherwise, the believer may end up facing much worse consequences.

5:26 If the believer does not settle God’s way, they will be held completely accountable for their wrong act.

AVOIDING LUST (5:27-30) ADULTERY ^{7th Commandment: Exodus 20:14 & Deuteronomy 5:18}

5:27 “*You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery’*” Again, emphasis was on the physical act.

5:28 Jesus corrected the traditional narrow definition by stating that even a lustful look or thought is an equal offense to the actual deed. It is also important to note that Jesus was speaking about all types of immorality: any sexual thoughts or behaviors outside of the covenant of a Biblical marriage (God’s way).

Biblical adultery refers to physical sin, as well as spiritual sin ^{Leviticus 20:6, Jeremiah 3:6-10, Hosea 1:2, 3:1, James 4:4}.

Physical immorality is a violation of the God-defined oneness of marriage ^{Genesis 2:24, 1 Corinthians 6:13-20},

however, there is also always a spiritual component, because even physical adultery is more a sin against God than it is a sin against man ^{Genesis 39:9, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8}.

In the next two verses of application, Jesus was not advocating self-mutilation, but was using these vivid hyperboles to illustrate the seriousness of the sins of ungodly lust/desire, the devastating effects of sin on a person’s life and the drastic steps that must be taken to eliminate sin. The “*right*” eye and hand are highlighted, because the right is considered the side of power/dominance ^{Matthew 22:44, Revelation 1:16}.

5:29 Jesus made the point that if a person is unable to control their eyes, and their “*right eye*” causes them to sin (*skandalizō*: to commit that which leads to fall or ruin), it would be better to “*gouge it out*” than to allow the sin to condemn them to hell (the body’s eye is the gateway to the heart/mind ^{Ephesians 1:18}).

5:30 Similarly, Jesus stated that it would be better to “*cut off*” a sinful hand than to send their body to hell.

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