

The Messiah Has Come
Week 17
Matthew 5:17-26
“Matters of The Heart (Part 1)”

Introduction

But The LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or his stature because I have rejected him. Humans do not see what The LORD sees, for humans see what is visible, but The LORD sees the heart.” **1 Samuel 16:7**

When The LORD preached His famous “*Sermon on The Mount*”, the main thrust of the message was intended to show His hearers (and us) just how we have all fallen short of God’s perfect standards. He did this not to demean those who heard, but rather, to show them their need for repentance and genuine salvation; salvation that can only be found in Him. For as the Scriptures have said:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 3:23

As long as we judge ourselves according to anything less than of God’s standards of perfection, then we will see no need for forgiveness. This sermon was given some two thousand years ago in order to draw us to the cross of Christ. And even though the message is painful for us to hear, it is given because **God so loved the world**. By the world’s standards, it would be foolish to criticize a person in order to help them, but that is exactly what God’s Word does to those who have ears to hear it. It points out our many flaws, so that they can be corrected in us. Though the world may not understand this, it is actually the highest form of love, for God longs to see us transformed into something much greater than we could ever imagine.

Every parent who has truly loved their child will enforce whatever correction in behavior that is needed in order to insure the best possible outcome for their personal growth. That’s what *love* does. And Christ did not come to condemn the world, but rather to reconcile it to The God Who created them. Most of us can quote **John 3:16** by heart, but not nearly as many are able to recite the verses that come after it.

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Anyone who believes in Him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in The Name of the one and only Son of God.

John 3:17-18

The LORD wanted the people to understand their need for a higher standard of righteousness than what they were being sold by the Pharisees, for those religious leaders were far more concerned with outward appearance than the inward spiritual condition. Therefore, they devised long lists of the various ways that a person could have observed the law of Moses in a legal sense without ever addressing the condition of a person’s heart.

By the time Christ came into the world, the religious traditions of the Pharisees had even taken precedent over the Scriptures themselves. People longed for someone to deliver them from all the religious rules and regulations. One of the many ways that the Pharisees had corrupted God’s Law was in the observance of the Sabbath. They added so many rules as to what a person could and could not do upon the Sabbath that they completely overshadowed the meaning of the day.

God wanted His people to set aside a day to honor Him and to meditate upon His Word. But by adding endless lists of do’s and don’ts, the special day was anything but restful and contemplative. Instead, it became a source of worry and stressful observance of ridiculous regulatory pressure. For example, God instructed his people to “rest and do no work” on this holy day. The Pharisees comprised exhaustive lists on exactly what would be considered “*work*” on the Sabbath. Even going so far as describing how far a person was allowed to walk from one room to the next in their own home without violating the Sabbath commandments! No wonder the people were longing for a Messiah to ease their burdens!

The Pharisees actually believed that by their rigid observances of The Law, they were highly favored by God. But Christ revealed to them that they were desperately wicked on the inside, while trying to impress on the outside. And this brings us to the key verse of His sermon:

For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven. **Matthew 5:20**

So, let us look together at this powerful word from The LORD today, as we see, *The Scriptures Fulfilled*, *Standards Upheld*, and *Sinfulness Revealed*. Please allow me to explain.

The Scriptures Fulfilled (vs. 17-19)

"Don't think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law until all things are accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven." **Matthew 5:17-19**

The first thing we need to notice is that The LORD said that He did not come to abolish "*The Law or The Prophets*". Notice that He said nothing in regard to the oral traditions of the Pharisees. And the reason for this is that He most certainly was opposed to *them*. He never once endorsed all their man-made additions to God's Word. For you see, God does not need our help in expressing Himself! His Word has all that we need. By the time Jesus began His earthly ministry, these oral laws had become synonymous with God's Word. And He very much intended to sever the bond between the two. His mission was both to uphold The Law of God and obliterate the oral traditions of men. And He intended to expose the hearts of those who would presume to add to God's Word, so that all the world would see just how evil the hearts of men truly are.

After we have established this truth, we must go on to what He said after this. He did not come to abolish The Law, but rather, to "*fulfill it*". The word that He uses here actually means to *complete* or *finish*. Some have argued that He is saying that He would keep every aspect of The Law in His time here on earth. And while this is most certainly true, for Jesus kept every single part of The Law never breaking a single one, for He was in fact *sinless*. This is not what is meant by the verse here.

To fully understand The LORD'S meaning, we must first understand the structure of The Law itself, which can be broken down into three parts. First there is the *Judicial Law*, which has to do with Israel's governing structure, methods of operation according to God's standards, along with its penalties for various sins. Jesus never broke a single one of these Laws, but His death on the cross ushered in a new covenant. Therefore, His coming fulfilled this part of The Law and replaced it with something far better, namely the kingdom of God.

The second part of The Law was the *Ceremonial Law*, which had to do with the various rituals and sacrifices instituted in the days of Moses. Each of these sacrifices and rituals actually pointed to Christ, and therefore, He fulfilled them and set them aside. They were no longer necessary. For in Him, the signs became a reality. There is no more need for any blood sacrifices for Jesus completed this part of The Law by serving as its ultimate sacrifice. This is why the writer of *Hebrews* declared:

Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come, and not the reality itself of those things, it can never perfect the worshipers by the same sacrifices they continually offer year after year. Otherwise, wouldn't they have stopped being offered, since the worshipers, purified once and for all, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in the sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year after year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Therefore, as He was coming into the world, He said:

You did not desire sacrifice and offering, but you prepared a body for Me.

You did not delight in whole burnt offerings and sin offerings.

**Then I said, "See — it is written about Me in the scroll —
I have come to do your will, God."**

After He says above, You did not desire or delight in sacrifices and offerings, whole burnt offerings and sin offerings (which are offered according to the law), He then says, See, I have come to do your will. He takes away the first to establish the second. By this will, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all time.

Every priest stands day after day ministering and offering the same sacrifices time after time, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after offering one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God. **Hebrews 10:1-12**

The third and final portion of The Law is known as the "Moral Law", and it can be summed up in two eternal commands, namely; **"Love The LORD your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself."** This moral law is very much still required of every Believer in Christ. So while He completed and replaced both the Ceremonial and Judicial Law with something far better, He also established the moral law in perpetuity. This is why He warns us that we must obey His commands, or we will be considered "least" in the kingdom of heaven.

It is also important to note that we do not lose our eternal salvation, when we fall short of the standards of the moral law, for that has been forever secured by The Savior to all who believe in His Name. However, we must one day stand before His judgment seat in order to give an account as to how we observed His moral law. And that is a reality not to be taken lightly.

Christ did not come to abolish The Law, but rather, He fulfilled every single portion of it by His sinless life and atoning death. And in so doing, He has established a New Covenant that is far superior to the Old Testament Law. After all, The Law was given to point us to The Savior, and **when that Savior came, The Law was completely fulfilled.**

The Standards Upheld (vs. 20)

For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven. **Matthew 5:20**

As I said earlier, this is the key verse in the sermon on the mount. Everything that comes after it is given as an expansion, a clarification if you will, of this verse. The message is clear, if you wish to enter into the kingdom of heaven, then you need to be much better than the Pharisees. This must have come as a shock to those who heard this message on the mountainside that day, for they had been led to believe that the Pharisees were the greatest religious people on the planet. How then, could anyone possibly exceed their righteousness? Sadly, they didn't really know what true righteousness, according to God's standard, really is. And even more importantly, God's standards for perfection never can, nor will ever, be compromised.

Christ was about to contrast the difference between the outward appearance of righteousness, and genuine inward purity, for **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God"** (**Matthew 5:8**). You see, it is one thing to obey the letter of the Law outwardly, and it is quite another to obey it from the heart.

Sandi and I recently drove to South Dakota for a short vacation. Love it out there! And since we drove, we found ourselves subject to the various highway speed laws of several states. Now personally, I like to drive in South Dakota. The speed limit out there is more suitable to my "driving style". But in most of the other states, I found the speed limits to be... to say the least, "oppressive". But for the "most part", I tried to obey them. Not because I loved the law, but because I didn't want a speeding ticket, not to mention I was trying to avoid Sandi's not so subtle reminders about my reckless disregard for proper

highway decorum. Do you see my point here? I was attempting to obey the law, but not with the right heart attitude. I would have driven much faster, had I not been afraid of the possible consequences.

People are like that with God's Law as well. They obey, because they are afraid of what others might say; (like the preacher, for instance), or in fear of what God might do to them. And they also obey, because it makes them feel better about themselves. Can you see how selfish all those motives are? Where is the love of God in all of that? ***"I do these things because I love God"*** is the attitude of someone whose had a genuine change of heart. So you see, you can do the right thing on the outside and still be wicked on the inside. And that is what Christ was about to expose in this famous sermon. What people see is on the outside, but God knows our hearts, and our true motivations are not lost on Him!

All a person's ways seem right to him, but The LORD weighs hearts. Proverbs 21:2

The Sinfulness Revealed (vs. 21-26)

"You have heard that it was said to our ancestors, Do not murder, and whoever murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Whoever insults his brother or sister will be subject to the court. Whoever says, 'You fool!' will be subject to hellfire. So if you are offering your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Reach a settlement quickly with your adversary while you're on the way with him to the court, or your adversary will hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out of there until you have paid the last penny. Matthew 5:21-26

One of my biggest prayers as we head into this section of the sermon, which expounds upon The LORD'S standards of holiness, is that I will not "water it down", so to speak. In my many years of doing this job, I have heard several "preachers" weaken this message to make these standards seem more doable in our flesh. There is not a human being alive who can live up to these righteous standards. That's why we all desperately need the imputed righteousness of the only One Who ever fulfilled The Law of God. Namely, we need the righteousness of Christ applied to us. And that can only be accomplished by placing our faith in Him, and Him alone, for our salvation. With this in mind, let us begin.

First of all, I want to warn you in advance that God's holy standards will reveal to us all what wretched sinners we truly are. As the prophet has so eloquently spoken, **"Our righteousness is as filthy rags..." (Isaiah 64:6)**. So I believe it is only fair to let you know ahead of time that when you see God's standard of holiness in contrast with your idea of holiness, it will be painful to endure. This is why salvation begins with a broken and humble spirit.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Matthew 5:3

The LORD starts this part of His sermon with the words, **"You have heard it was said..."**. This, of course, is a direct repudiation to the teaching of the Pharisees. They were considered the supreme religious authority in the land. And that is why the oral traditions of the Pharisees were actually given more weight than the Scriptures themselves. The common people felt inadequate to understand the Scriptures (as many still do today), and therefore, they relied upon the Pharisees teaching in order to be obedient to God's Word. This is why The LORD warned so sternly against teachers who lessen the weight of The Law (**vs. 19**).

He begins this portion with murder, the most heinous of all capital crimes. Always punishable by death in *The Old Testament*. Accidental killings were treated with more grace, but intentional murder always required the death penalty by God. It should be the same today, in my humble opinion, for to kill someone who has been created in the image of God is an attack upon The Creator Himself!

The Pharisees, of course, taught that murder was a sin, but only the act itself. God does not just look at what we do, but rather, He looks upon the heart behind our actions. And the crowd must have been stunned to hear The Son of God speaking from that mountaintop as He explained just whom God

considers a murderer. For you see, you can technically obey a rule in the physical sense, but if your heart is not in it, then you still obeyed for the wrong reason! In short, it's not what you do, so much as what you *"wanted to do"*.

Now, exactly what does God consider murder? Are you ready for this? *Anger*. Read the words of The Savior carefully:

But I tell you, everyone who is ANGRY with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Whoever insults his brother or sister will be subject to the court. Whoever says, "You fool!" will be subject to hellfire. **Matthew 5:22**

As I said earlier, I have heard many preachers try and water this down. They have tried to change the meaning of the word to everything from uncontrollable hatred to unending rage. The translators of The KJV *Bible* even added the words "without cause", which was rumored to be added to soothe the ruffled feathers of King James himself, for he was known to have a terrible temper. But here is the bottom line, the fruit of the Spirit is self-control (**Galatians 5:22-23**), which means, if you are under The Spirit's control, then so is your temper! I told you this was going to be convicting, so don't say I didn't warn you!

Now, listen to what The Word of God says about those who are controlled by the flesh, and you will understand exactly what The Savior is saying here:

Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, OUTBURSTS OF ANGER, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I am warning you about these things — as I warned you before — that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:19-21 (emphasis added)

Now, Jesus goes on to say that if you have a problem with someone, as a kingdom citizen, you are obligated to work it out with them before it ends up in court. This has an earthly and a heavenly implication. For even if you do not end up settling your differences in an earthly courtroom, it would be wise to remember that one day we will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and it would certainly be prudent to get everything straightened out before then!

To fly off the handle or to insult someone made in the image of God is, as we stated earlier, an affront to God Himself. So we must learn to control both our tempers and our tongues, as we rely upon the power of The Holy Spirit and not the uncontrollable whims of our own fleshy natures!

If anyone thinks he is religious without controlling his tongue, his religion is useless and he deceives himself. **James 1:26**

Pretty convicting, is it not?

Now, I know what you're thinking. Is it ever *right* to get angry? Answer: Yes. But only if it is righteous anger. Jesus was furious with the moneychangers in the temple. Why? Because they were profaning the house of God. We as Believers should get angry, when we hear or see someone desecrate the Holy Name of the One we serve. But that anger must always be ***controlled***. We don't get to throw temper tantrums like an out of control toddler.

My dear brothers and sisters, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for human anger does not accomplish God's righteousness. **James 1:19-20**

I could actually do an entire series on this concept, but for the interest of time, I need to stop here. Suffice to say, that if we cannot control our own temper and angry emotions, then we have some serious praying to do. We need to be under the Spirit's control, so that we do not tarnish the reputation of The Savior or His Church in this world. God's standards are high standards, and His holiness exposes the sin in all of us. May we never forget that we are wretched sinners, saved by the grace of a merciful God. And may we ever strive, by His power, to be transformed into the image of His Holy Son. Amen and amen.

TRUTH!!!