

A Call to a New Way of Life

The King's Standard of Righteousness for it's Citizens

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC

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Text: Matthew 5:17-30

Purpose: Jesus set forth His authority as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Law. He is the one anticipated as Messiah. This passage of scripture sets forth the standards of the citizens of the Kingdom of God.

A minister decided that a visual demonstration would add emphasis to his Sunday sermon. Four worms were placed into four separate jars.



The first worm was put into a container of alcohol.
The second worm was put into a container of cigarette smoke.
The third worm was put into a container of chocolate syrup.
The fourth worm was put into a container of good clean soil.

At the conclusion of the sermon, the minister reported the following results:

The first worm in alcohol...Dead.

The second worm in cigarette smoke...Dead.

Third worm in chocolate syrup...Dead.

Fourth worm in good clean soil...Alive.

So, the Minister asked the congregation, "What did you learn from this demonstration?"

Maxine was sitting in the back, quickly raised her hand and said, "As long as you drink, smoke and eat chocolate, you won't have worms!"

That pretty much ended the service!

I guess the point the minister was trying to make was that you should not drink, you should not smoke, and you should watch what you eat – at least if you expect to live.

Anytime people come together as a group, there is a tendency to institute rules so that if they live by the rules, they will be an accepted part of the group. If you want to be a part of the Rotary Club, you need to attend meetings weekly, participate in their fundraisings, and know the motto. If you were to attend a Holiness church, you need to know you should not show up wearing a lot of make up, gold jewelry, or wearing a short skirt.



If you were to examine the rules of the Amish community, you would see that they do not drive cars, their children don't attend school beyond the 8th grade, they do not have electricity in their homes, and they live very close to the land and shun most outside contact.

If you were to look at those that follow the Muslim faith, you would find that they pray five times daily facing Mecca, fast one month out of the year during Ramadan. They use the Koran as their Holy Book and follow the teachings and rules found in it.

If you were to look at the Mormons, you would find they accept the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Doctrine and Covenants as their guide book for their faith community.

Even at school and work, you will find a list of written or unwritten rules to successfully attend or work there. Failure to follow the rules will lead to your expulsion from the group.



When Jesus began His teaching ministry, many people began to wonder if He had come to change the rules. After all, the Jewish leaders were very good at making rules for people to live by. You could not walk more than a certain distance on the Sabbath or it was considered working. You could not cook anything on the Sabbath or it was considered working. You could not even pluck a few grains of wheat to eat on the Sabbath because it was considered a violation of the law. It seems as if Jesus was breaking a few of these laws and was attracting attention from many as One that had come to destroy the law and establish a new way of living.

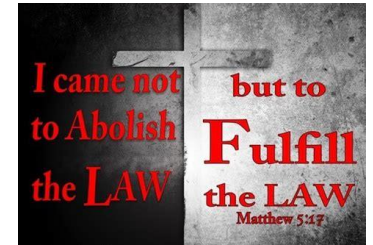
Jesus was calling His followers to a new way of living, but it was not what the people expected. Jesus was laying down principles for the kingdom He was establishing. Our passage of scripture today brings us to one of the longest teachings by Jesus in the New Testament. Matthew 5, verses 17 to 20 point us to the principles by which Jesus would order His kingdom. Verses 21 to 48 give us six examples of how this new righteousness is to be lived out.

No, I am not going to try and cover all six of those examples. Let's look at just the first two today.

THE PRINCIPLE OF THE KINGDOM OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Jesus begins by stating His relationship with the Old Mosaic Law.

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law and the prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled."
(5:17-18)



Jesus had great respect for the Law. He said, *"I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."* He came to fill the law to the fullest. He came to meet every requirement, and more, to fill with meaning that which was previously unknown. The Law was not annulled, but transcended by a higher law of love.

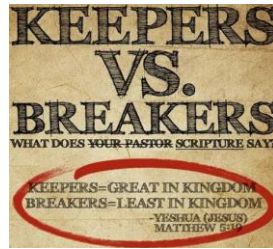
All the Law must be fulfilled. It will last. The scribes insisted on keeping the ceremonial laws of tradition in addition to the Mosaic Law, even down to the last dotted "i" and crossed "t," but they missed the spirit of the original intent of the Law.

Jesus was not interested in ceremonially keeping the minute details of the rabbinic law, but rather He came to reveal the real purpose of the Law.

T. W. Manson says this is Jesus' satire toward the legalistic scribes. He says, "The world will end sooner than you scribes will give up the tiniest bit of tradition by which you make the Law of no effect." In coming to earth Jesus supplemented the light in the Law and the prophets. He brought the Law to its intended completeness.

Clyde Francisco, in *Studies in Jeremiah*, (p. 112) says, "It is clear that the success of the old agreement was dependent upon Israel's ability to keep it. This she could not do. Why, then, was it made with her? To lead her to see the necessity of the new one. Man would never accept grace if he thought he could deserve the favor of God. And he thinks he deserves it until he comes to see his own helplessness. The old covenant revealed Israel's inability to meet God's requirements."

As citizens of Jesus' kingdom, we are still related to the Old Testament and the law. Jesus illustrated this in verse 19.



"Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

We need to respect and keep the law of God. It is foundational to our development as Christians. To hold them in neglect, disgust, or contempt, is to reject what God has ordained as good. But we need to be careful to not entangle ourselves in the minutia of the scribes and rabbinic traditions.

The level of commitment to the old law is illustrated in verse 20.

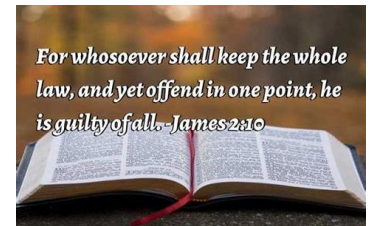
"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

We are called to keep and observe the Ten Commandments. But Jesus is calling us to a higher loyalty. It is like we have moved from a childish understanding of the law to an adult understanding of the law. While the Ten Commandments provided the scaffolding for living a righteous life, the Sermon on the Mount, provided the rest of the framework for Christians to live by.



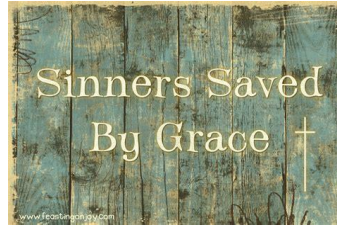
Hunter says (p. 45), "Let us beware how we use the word "law." Laws, as we understand the word, are founded on a calculation of how most men may reasonably be expected to act.

The assumption is that with a reasonable effort man may keep them. But if Christ's commands are laws of this kind, who is sufficient for them? No anger, no lust, no swearing, no retaliation--who can rise to the height of these demands? If our salvation depends on our perfect keeping of these "laws," we are doomed to be damned, and Christ is laying on his disciples a burden far heavier than the scribes and Pharisees did on theirs. This cannot be legislation. To be sure, this is how God means men to live; but though all who



call themselves Christ's disciples must try to live according to this pattern, none of us who live in a fallen world dare claim, "All these have I kept." More clearly than any other part of the Sermon, these verses at once declare the Christian moral ideal and convict us of our sin. We may, with Paul, give thanks to God that we are saved not by law but by grace.

Our righteous adherence to the higher law does not save us. It comes out of a genuine desire to live according to the spirit of the law – not by the letter of the law. There is a vast difference.



Laws are set up for the purpose of keeping order in the affairs of men. By them people are compelled to be civil to one another. They may not want to do that, but they are forced to do it.

A good citizen is one who keeps the law gladly and would do so if there were no such law. He doesn't keep the law just because he is watched or might be seen by police or others, but because he wants to keep the law for the good of all. One that is concerned for the safety of others, will keep their car within the speed limit. If one is concerned about promoting a better environment, they will not litter or pollute, not out of fear of a ticket, but out of a higher righteousness.

The only way we as citizens of the Kingdom of God can keep the law is that we must have a spirit of willingness and surrender. It calls for a radical inner obedience of the heart

and will. In this way the Kingdom person's righteousness "exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees,..."

AN EXAMPLE OF KINGDOM RIGHTEOUSNESS – AS IT RELATES TO MURDER

Jesus chose six examples found in the law in which He takes to a higher plane of observance. (We are only going to look at the first two.) These are all a matter of the heart. These are heart attitudes, not laws or rules we need to keep. These are inner principles, and not legislation. If these are laws, then we are doomed before we begin. No person can keep all of these things, but they constitute the ideal for us as Christians.

The first example Jesus talks about is the sixth commandment.



Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder,' and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment." (5:21)

Men of old said, "*You shall not kill.*" The Mosaic Law, like our civil law, tried to deal with the overt, outward act of murder, after it was perpetrated. There was no effort at prevention, except for the fear of harm or punishment, and it has not been proved conclusively that capital punishment decreases murders. The Law dealt with murder after the fact.

But Jesus takes this old commandment and reinterprets it for the citizens of His kingdom.

“But this I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”
(5:22)



Jesus is calling us not just to obey the commandment not to murder, but we need to watch our inner thoughts. We are called to not allow our anger to build within us. The old law dealt with the outside actions of a person. Jesus is calling us to pay attention to the inner person and not to allow anger have a place in our life. Yes, we all get angry at times. But we do not need to allow it to grow within us. We do not need to give anger a foothold in our life. If we do, it will rule us instead of us ruling our own lives.

So many people today are sitting in prison because they did not get their anger under control early. They allowed some wrong to fester in their spirit until it came out with full rage and fury. They could have snapped at a person because they looked at another person wrong. They could have lashed out at a parent, a sibling, a neighbor, or even a random person. Unchecked anger destroys us from the inside. Jesus is calling us to examine our heart and figure out what is making us angry and to address it before it reaches the level of murder.

The inner fires of anger cannot be judged by human courts, but the inner fires of human anger will lead to the judgment of God. The word “Angry” is used in the English language

as a present participle; it implies a continuing, ongoing state of anger, and of living in a state of anger.

As citizens of Jesus’ kingdom, we are called to have love and concern for others more than ourselves. Kingdom people must not hold toward others an attitude of derision, derogation, or contempt. If we allow that to grow in us, murder may follow. We all have words in our vocabularies which should become extinct, archaic, and erased from our hearts.

Jesus gives us some positive steps to take if we are to live according to the higher calling.

“Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way.

First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” (5:23-24)



How can God accept a gift if the giver is out of step with his fellow man or any person? When a person offers a gift in the temple or church, and remembers someone at odds with him, he should take the positive step of seeking reconciliation, and then offer the gift. As a Christian, we are called to take the first step towards reconciliation. Some say it is the other person that should move first. But we are called to be the ones seeking to live in harmony with others so we can live without regrets with God.

Jesus gives us another example about how we are to live in community with others.

“Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.” (5:25-26)



Maybe you are different than I am. Maybe you never have had a disagreement with another person. Over the years, I have had conflict with others. I have used this principal time and time again and it has never failed me. I had a tenant that fell on hard times and could not pay their rent. We agreed quickly that if they moved, I would refund their security deposit as long as they left the house clean. I could have gotten angry and taken them to court, but I never would have gotten the house back in good condition and they could have dragged their feet for months if I acted harshly with them.

I have had people do work for me before and we disagreed as to how much they should have been paid. After coming to a compromise, we settled quickly.

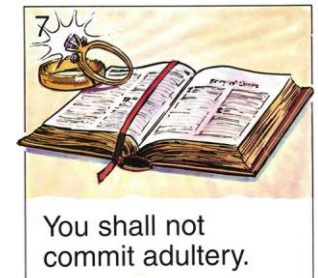
The principal involved is that we as Christians are to be the ones that go the extra mile, even if we have to swallow some pride, pay a little more money, and suffer an injustice: we are called to settle our disagreements peaceably.

I realize that cannot always happen. But we will often be the ones to come out on the short end of the stick if we head to court. If at all possible, work towards a peaceable solution.

AN EXAMPLE OF KINGDOM RIGHTEOUSNESS – AS IT RELATES TO ADULTERY

As hard as it is to keep our emotions in check when it comes to anger, one that is even more difficult to keep in check is one called lust. Just as anger may lead to murder, lust may lead to adultery.

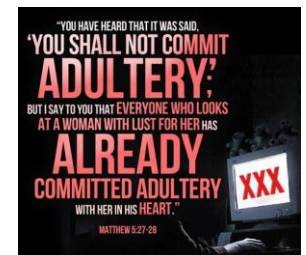
Jesus reminded His followers, *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’” (5:27)*



The Old Testament Law was concerned with the overt sex act. R. H. Charles in *The Decalogue*, (p. 213), said: “The seventh commandment took account not so much of the sin of impurity as of a sin against property.”

The standards in Old Testament times were very low by our standards. Harlotry, concubines, and polygamy were widespread. It was when someone violated the wife or betrothed of a Jew that violation came.

Just as Jesus reinterpreted the commandment against murder, He once again raised the commandment against adultery to a higher standard of living.



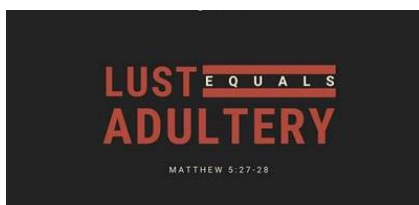
“But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (5:28)

Jesus extended adultery's meaning to be far more than its Old Testament meaning. He made it to refer to all impurity between any man and any woman. His focus, once again was on the inward walk, the inward purity, instead of an outward adherence to the law.

When Jesus said, *“Whoever looks at a woman to lust after her”* implies a steady gaze with an evil intent. The Greek idiom used shows that Jesus means not the involuntary working of the sexual impulse, but the deliberate intent to sin. (Hunter, p. 48)

I must admit that this appears to be addressed primarily at men. Yes, women can become entangled with lust, but men are the primary audience Jesus is addressing here.

Jesus is saying that looking lustfully at a woman makes you guilty of adultery. I don't know any man that has not been weighed by this standard and found innocent. It is difficult to watch TV, walk down the street, go into a store, and not find some person drawing our eye. Proverbs 4:25 is advice from Solomon to men. *“Let your eyes look straight ahead, and let your eyelids look right before you.”* Job 31:1 said, *“I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman.”* Job said he made a *“covenant with his eyes.”* You need to make a covenant with your eyes not to let your look linger.



The real sin with this is that a woman becomes regarded as an object of gratification rather than a person of equal worth. Prostitution, adultery, and pornography breed and magnify gratification and degrade the person to one that satisfies the lust of the flesh.

There was a time when pornography was primarily a problem with men. But more and more women are getting pulled into the problem of sexual addiction. We need to be mindful that those attractions are only illusions and only consume more of you as you give into those lustful attractions. You need to, both men and women, make a covenant with your eyes not to allow that sin to overtake you.

We need to become aware of how we dress and what we do that may cause another person to view you inappropriately. I am not talking about making rules for clothing or make up. Simply keep in mind that what you wear may be sending the wrong signals to others. You need to be mindful of the words you say that may be inappropriate. You need to be mindful in the way you act that could be sending the wrong message.

It all boils down to self discipline. If we don't discipline ourselves, then no one else can either. Jesus suggested that self discipline was so important, because the consequences of failure have eternal consequences.



“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole

body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.”
(5:29-30)

To lose a member of your body, like an eye or hand is better than spending eternity in hell. Yes, Jesus did say there is a hell. I know some individuals do not feel that Hell is a real place or that the Bible mentions it, but there it is.

Jesus is calling us to an inner life of self discipline. He is not simply speaking of adhering to the rules of the Old Testament Law, He is raising the stakes! Our internal life is what God will be judging us on, not our outward law keeping! If our heart or eye is corrupt, then simply amputating them will not solve our sin problem. We must turn our lives around and commit to live in full obedience to the intent, purpose, and spirit of the law, not just the letter of the law.



I don't know about you, but Jesus has made the rules of His kingdom very different from the former law. Jesus did not eliminate the law; He is calling us to live above and beyond the bare framework of the law. Living like this takes a life time of work and dedication.

The good news we have with Jesus is that we have grace sufficient to cover our sin when we fail to live up to this high and holy standard. When we get angry with others, we simply come back to Jesus and He will forgive us time and

time again. We don't need to see ourselves as a failure, instead, we need to see ourselves as a work in progress. We are all working out our salvation. We should be striving to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus. We are not perfect, nor will we ever be. But we have a perfect Savior.

When we fail in the lust area, we need to come and confess those sins to God and allow Him to make us new once again. We cannot walk in sin and fellowship with God at the same time. God understands our weak frame and our sinful tendencies. He was in all ways tempted like we were, yet was without sin. When we come before His presence, He forgives unconditionally.

Let us walk in newness of life. Not as the heathen do, following the lusts of the flesh. Let us walk as ones that have not yet attained, but are walking as children of the King.

Jesus fulfilled all by His first coming. He will complete the rest when He comes again to take His bride, the Church, to be with Him eternally around the throne of God. Let us be found faithful until He comes.

LET US PRAY

